

## AN EXPLORATION INTO THE CHRISTOLOGY OF GANDHI

Jesus Christ is the center of devotion and commitment of millions of people through out the world, within the institutionalized churches as well as out side of them. It is recognized, even in the proto-/primitive church, that there are secret disciples<sup>1</sup>, sympathizers and proselytes, 'Churchless Christians'<sup>2</sup>, 'un-baptized Christians', and they may be as many as active and inactive members of the Christian population of the world. Mahatma Gandhi may be one among them, though he emphatically insisted that he is, first and foremost, a 'sanatani' Hindu<sup>3</sup>. It is within this context, and from 'sanatani' periscope, his Christology has to be looked into, rather than from the dogmatic and doctrinal Christian point of view, in order to understand, and estimate, his contribution towards indigenous expressions of Christ. It has its own advantage, which has, so far, not been recognized, and we propose to make an effort to discover this in this study.

Eastern Christianity in India, though introduced soon after the end of the earthly life of Jesus Christ, contained itself, from its very inception in this sub-continent, with a few indigenous followers. It is the Western Christianity that came with the evangelical and missionary zeal to win over India for Christ which can be ascribed for the rapid and numerical expansion of Christianity in this continent. Historically speaking, the numerical and indigenous expansion of Christian faith in India was the direct result of missionary zeal of Western Christianity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the process of transportation, Christianity was given in lock, stock and barrel, the western edition of scripture, dogmas, doctrines, ritual, liturgy, catechism, institution, church governance, and everything that is associated and developed in Christianity up to that time in the 'home-churches'. No wonder one hears the complaint that India has not produced any worthwhile heresy, theology of its own or commentary on the Bible, even on the Gospel of John which is considered closer to Indian mysticism. While searching for an explanation, one may grudgingly agree with Chenchaiiah that the 'raw fact of Christ' was not offered to the religious minded Indians who could have taken him as per their needs and religious aspirations.

In-spite of this, there were many who encountered Christ on the Indian roads and have tried to understand him in their own ways. They wrestled with the 'raw fact of Christ' and developed their own Christology quite different from the ones that would have been granted 'imprimatur' of the official Church. Raja Rammohan Roy, Kesheb Chandra Sen Rabindra Nath Tagore and Mani Lal Parekh in the Brahma tradition, Dayananda Saraswati and his Arya Samaj tradition, Swaimi Vivekananda and his Ramakrishana tradition, and Gandhi, Radhakrishnan and neo-

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. Joseph of Arimathea (Jn. 19:38)

<sup>2</sup> for detail discussion, see Hoeffler, *Churchless Christianity*, Chennai: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College & Research Institute,

<sup>3</sup> Young India, October 6, 1921

vedantic and nationalist tradition can be mentioned among those who have been pioneers in contributing towards the development of Christian theology in Indian crucible.

Let us now turn to the Gandhi's understanding of Christ and, in the process, evaluate his contribution towards an evolving Christology in Indian setting. We should have to be aware, at the very outset of this study, that one has to first understand his 'theological circle' without imposing one's own upon his; this freedom is necessary in order to appreciate the input he, or for that matter others, can provide for our own understanding of the same Reality. In this effort, we are first invited to explore that circle.

A word of clarification may be helpful; we will be using the terms, Gandhi and Gandhian, synonymously, avoiding the confusion that may creep in with the later thought developed by the followers and scholars of Gandhi.

### **Understanding Gandhi's faith**

As noted above, Gandhi would prefer to call himself a '*sanatani* Hindu'. It may be helpful if we take his own statement in understanding his religion: 'I call myself a *sanatani* Hindu, because I believe in the Vedas, Upanishads, the *Puranas* and the writings left by the holy reformers. This belief does not require me to accept as authentic everything that passes as *Shastras*. I reject everything that contradicts the fundamental principles of morality. I am not required to accept the *ipse dixit*, or the interpretations of *Pandits*. Above all, I call myself a *Sanatani* Hindu, so long as the Hindu society in general accepts me as such. In a concrete manner, he is a Hindu who believes in God, in immortality of the soul, transmigration, the law of *Karma* and *Moksha*, and who tries to preach Truth and *Ahimsa* in daily life, and therefore, practices cow-protection in its widest sense and understands and tries to act according to the Law of *varnashrama*.<sup>4</sup>

Here we find him defining his faith as '*Sanatani* Hindu along with his definition and understanding of the Hindu religion. As a deeply religious person, and a pragmatic politician, he often accepts both, sometimes oscillates between them, or rejects the other as per the demands of the situation. It is for this reason, he reserves his right of freedom to accept or reject Scriptural authority and anything that contradicts the fundamental principles of morality, and thus liberated his religion from narrowness and bigotry. It is also interesting to note that his calling himself a *Sanatani* Hindu is conditioned by the acceptance of Hindu society in general.

One cannot fail to note the 'scriptural inclusivism' of Gandhi; he considers not only Veda' as scripture, but also Upanishads, *Puranas* and writings of the holy reformers. Upanishads as a part of Veda, of course, does form the 'Shruti', revelatory tradition of the Hindu scriptures, but not the *Puranas*, which is a part of '*smriti*', reflective tradition. Most of the Hindu devotional and religious mysticism, Bhakti tradition as it is commonly understood, has its source in Puranic literature. Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824-83), the founder of Arya Samaj, has been successful in propagating 'scriptural exclusivism' to the Hindus and thus laid the foundation of

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<sup>4</sup> (All Religions Are True, cited henceforth as ARAT, p. 16; Young India, Oct. 14, 1926)

Hindu nationalism based on the exclusive principles. However, his exclusion of 'smriti' literatures from the purview of scriptures, with some of his severest critique, did not go well with the Sanatani Hindus. Gandhi re-established the 'sanatani' position, based upon the inclusive principles, with much force and acceptance. It is this principle, which is the directive principle of all his activities in life - political, religious, social and personal.

### **Gandhian Epistemology**

Gandhi's ways of knowing, so thoroughly demonstrated in his autobiography, is through experiments and experiences at personal level; it is Perceptual Epistemology. Knowing, for him, is a process gained experientially through trial and error method. Christians, for example, led him to Christianity and Bible, which, in turn to a discovery of Christ. As he recalls: 'Even when I was 18, I came in touch with good Christians in London. Before that I had come in touch with what I then used to call 'beef and beer-bottle Christianity', for these were regarded as the indispensable criteria of a man becoming a Christian, with also a third thing, namely, adoption of a European style of dress...I came across good Christian there who place Bible in my hands...I have since grown to this belief that Christianity is as good and as true a religion as my own'.<sup>5</sup> As such, it is subject to changes and revisions, making it difficult to say, with certain amount of surety, what would have been his final conclusion and definite views on certain subjects, even if they were clearly stated. It is prudent, therefore, to guard oneself from claiming any finality on the Gandhian thought. This open-ness of Gandhi, however, is a blessing in disguise for the Gandhians, for they can go on experimenting with the truth, thus, making it contemporary and contextual. There are, however, a few views that reflect his convictions, and they can be considered as ultimate criteria of his judgment in life and knowledge.

What is arrived at with his experimentation and experience is Truth. This truth, therefore, is the core of Gandhi's epistemology. Moreover, Truth, for Gandhi, is absolute and ultimate criterion of everything, and he un-waveringly asserts its supremacy in no uncertain way: 'Truth is superior to everything, and I reject what conflicts with it'.<sup>6</sup> We will have to look into it from different perspectives- epistemological, theological, philosophical, and moral, to mention a few, in order to gain some insights into the complex mind of Gandhi. In this section, we shall limit ourselves to the epistemological foundation of Gandhian theology/philosophy of religion.

Gandhi proposes three criteria upon which truth is founded, and he sees no difficulty in examining any truth-claims made on behalf of religions. They are reason, non-violence and faith. Reason is a criterion upon which truth of any matter has to be judged: 'And, on matters which can be reasoned out, that which conflicts with reason must also be rejected'.<sup>7</sup>

Non-Violence is another criterion of truth, as he asserts: '...that which is in conflict with non-violence should be rejected'.<sup>8</sup> One can note that Gandhi includes an ethical principle as a

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<sup>5</sup> (ARAT, p. 45: Harijan, cited henceforth as H, March 6, 1937).

<sup>6</sup> (ARAT, p. 47: H, March 6, 1937)

<sup>7</sup> (ARAT, p. 47; H, March 6, 1937)

criterion of truth. This inclusion is in consistence with his understanding of Truth, which is a philosophical-ethical principle.

Faith is a surprise addition to the rational and ethical criteria of truth to give credence to those matters, which cannot be reasoned out. This faith is transcendental and can be grasped only through sixth sense: '...there are subjects where reason cannot take us far and we have to accept things on faith. Faith then does not contradict reason, but transcends it. Faith is a kind of sixth sense which works in cases which are without the purview of reason.'<sup>9</sup>

### **Gandhian Hermeneutics**

Critical theory of inspiration of the scriptures is the option Gandhi chooses while rejecting the inspiration theory of the scriptures as a whole; '...I do not regard every word of the Bible as the inspired word of God, even as I do not regard every word of the Vedas or the Quran as inspired'.<sup>10</sup> He would, rather, have it qualified: 'the sum total of each of these books is certainly inspired, but I miss that inspiration in many of the things taken individually'.<sup>11</sup> He is, thus, providing support to a liberal and critical approach to the scriptures at a time when orthodoxy was gaining some ground in the Indian religious scene of the time.

Principle of Literalism in interpretation will be the one Gandhi would like to stick with. Any material interpretation of the words, phrases or concepts, he would reject, though he is not averse to figurative and metaphorical interpretation. Rejecting the Christological title, 'only begotten Son of God' and interpreting it in his own way, he points out that 'Metaphorically, we are all begotten sons of God, but for each of us there may be different begotten sons of God in a special sense'.<sup>12</sup> It is the application of this principle of literal interpretation, in the context of the phrase 'only begotten son of God' that he remarks: 'That epithet, in its material interpretation, is quite unacceptable'.<sup>13</sup>

Principle of Doctrinal Bias also plays an important part in the hermeneutics of Gandhi. He however, would not mind to give allowance to the personal doctrinal bias to certain interpretation of the scriptures. One such case is the issue of violence and non-violence. He holds fast his faith in non-violence, which he derives from the Gita, while acknowledging that others can find support for violence in the same Gita. The same, he observes, may be true with the interpretations of the Bible and the Quran where one can settle the issue either way, but he would go along with the supporters of the non-violence. He is aware that some may still have the freedom to opt for the non-violence on the basis of their interpretation of the scriptures; yet, he would not opt for that interpretation. On the specific of prescription of violence in the Quran,

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<sup>8</sup> (ARAT, p. 47: H, March 6, 1937).

<sup>9</sup> (ARAT, p.47; H, March 6, 1937).

<sup>10</sup> (ARAT, p. 45: H, March 6, 1937).

<sup>11</sup> (ARAT, p. 46: H, March 6, 1937).

<sup>12</sup> (ARAT, p. 49: H, April 17, 1937).

<sup>13</sup> (ARAT, p. 49: H, April 17, 1937).

he is firm on his resolve: 'But if the worst come to the worst, and if I came to the conclusion that the Quran teaches violence, I would still reject violence...'.<sup>14</sup>

Principle of Autonomy has an important role to play in Gandhi's ways of interpretation to the scriptures. He falls back to this principle whenever he feels that there are contradictions, and differences, in interpretation of certain scriptural texts or concepts. The principle of doctrinal bias, which he proposes, is not helpful in settling the issue; in fact, it encourages more discords, and has to be based on firmer rational ground. This firmer rational ground is the principle of autonomy, and he makes it independent of scriptures. He claims that autonomy to non-violence, as he asserts: 'It is enough that my non-violence is independent of the sanction of scriptures'.<sup>15</sup>

### **Theology of Religion**

The world of plurality, of difference, of numerous shapes and forms, is a fact of life that is easily recognized and accepted by Gandhi. The same is true with religion: 'If we search, we may find as many religions as there are men'.<sup>16</sup> There should not be any difficulty in accepting this proposition as this is the fact of our situation and context, but difficulty arises when one happens to claim superiority over others and absoluteness of his religion, branding others relative and false. In the emotional and communal attachment to one's own religious tradition, one tends to forget that 'Differences in the world there have been and will be'<sup>17</sup>, and unnecessarily becomes judgmental. Gandhi tries to be rational and appeals to common-sense.

It is from this pluralistic point of world-view that Gandhi looks at other religions and expresses his reservations against those, like Christianity, who claim themselves to be the true religions: 'I would also dispute the claim that Christianity is the only true religion. It is also a true religion, a noble religion, and along with other religions it has contributed to raise the moral height of mankind'<sup>18</sup>.

This, 'as good and true a religion as my own', as noted in the previous section<sup>19</sup>, led him to further enquiry and he, in the course of his own struggles, developed his own theology of religion, one of whose foundation is expressed in this statement: '...there was no such thing as only one true religion and every other false. There is no religion that is absolutely perfect. All are equally imperfect or, more or less, perfect'.<sup>20</sup>

The equality of religions with respect to perfection and imperfection, truth and falsehood is the cornerstone of his theology of religion, as he himself asserts and explains: 'All religions are true and equal. That, however, is not to say that they are equally true in religious terms or are

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<sup>14</sup> (ARAT, p. 48: H, March 6, 1937).

<sup>15</sup> (ARAT, p. 48: H, March 6, 1937)

<sup>16</sup> (ARAT, p.46: Chandrashanker Shukla, Conversations of Gandhiji, Bombay; Vohra & Co, p. 85, cited as CG). .

<sup>17</sup> (ARAT, p46: CG, p.85)

<sup>18</sup> (ARAT, p.46: H, March 6, 1937)

<sup>19</sup> (ARAT, 45)

<sup>20</sup> (ARAT, p. 45; H, March 6, 1937).

absolutely true. Another man's religion is true for him, as mine is for me. I cannot be a judge of his religion. That is my fundamental position'.<sup>21</sup>

It is on this principle, and 'fundamental position', that he disputes the claim of any religion as the only true religion, and resists the temptation of becoming a judge in the disputes. His theology of religion is guided by three criteria: equality in truth claims, validity of one's own religion and relativity of judgment. One can see the influence of Jain epistemology, with its insistence on principle of relativity (*Anekantavada*), evolving as the criteria upon which Gandhi worked out inter-religion relationships.

Gandhi, therefore, naturally approves a belief in the relativity of Truth (God and Truth, as we see later, are synonymous in Gandhian thought). His argument is simple: 'Hundreds of men are merely striving to know the truth. They will put the Truth in their own way. No two men will put it in identical terms...If I am a seeker of Truth, it is quite sufficient for me. I cannot say that because I have seen God in this way, the whole world must see Him in that way'.<sup>22</sup>

The relativity of religions is almost a creed for Gandhi. Principle of relativity, as applied to religions, does not encourage the negative attitude that is associated with the comparative study of religions as developed in some of the western theological schools of thought. Gandhi himself was a keen student of religions, but he distaste comparative approach that casts aspersion to one or the other religion, sits on judgment over others, and claims superiority/ inferiority on behalf of his/other religion. Studies of religions brings forth the fact that we lack complete historical data to rely upon in cases of religions, ancient as well as modern, apart from the fact to find a suitable person to judge and arbitrate between the conflicting claims on behalf of a particular religion or a particular religious personality. Doctrinal superiority that can be a corollary to his principle of autonomy is rejected by its propounder, if so applied in the case of religions: 'But if the worst come to the worst, and if I came to the conclusion that the Quran teaches violence, I would still reject violence; but I would not, therefore, say that the Bible is superior to Quran or that Mohammed is inferior to Jesus. It is not my function to judge Mohammed and Jesus'.<sup>23</sup>

### **Jivan-mukta as Christology**

Gandhiji has deep respect for Jesus, as he expresses himself: (If you mean the living Christ) then I can say that Jesus occupies in my heart the place of one of the greatest teachers who have made a considerable influence on my life. Leave the Christians alone for the present; I shall say to the Hindus that your life will be incomplete unless you reverently study the teachings of Jesus.<sup>24</sup> He regarded Jesus as 'a great teacher of humanity' but not the 'begotten son of God', who does not need any prophecies and miracles for such a conviction: 'I regard Jesus as a great teacher of

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<sup>21</sup> (ARAT, p. 46-47: CG p. 85

<sup>22</sup> (ARAT, p. 46: GC, p.85).

<sup>23</sup> (ARAT, p. 48: H, March 6, 1937).

<sup>24</sup> ARAT, p.51

humanity, but do not regard him as the only begotten son of God...I do not need either the prophecies or the miracles to establish Jesus' greatness as a teacher. Nothing can be more miraculous than the three years of his ministry'.<sup>25</sup> He has a problem with the phrase, 'the only begotten son of God' as applied only to Jesus, and not to other humans. but has a problem in assigning him a special place as 'Son of God': 'I do not take literally true the text that Jesus is the only begotten son of God'.<sup>26</sup> Here, he applies reason as criteria of truth to discern irrationality in such claim. It is absurd to him, as it was to the Islamic theologians and Hindu reformers, that God can not marry and beget children. Hence he rejected any material interpretation to the epithet. He would like to see the word 'son' in a figurative and metaphorical sense, and would not mind to use the title, 'begotten son of God' for anyone who stands in the position of Jesus. He, however, suggests to make a distinction between ordinary sons of God, which would include all humans- man and women- and spiritually superior humans, like Jesus, Chaitanya and others; the first can be classed as the 'children of God', while the second, 'the sons of God'. Moreover, as he argues, "God can not be exclusive Father and I cannot ascribe exclusive divinity to Jesus. He is as divine as Krishna or Rama or Mahammed or Zoroaster."<sup>27</sup>

Mahatma Gandhi was not convinced that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God. If this is so, then all men are equally sons of God; if he is divine, he is as divine as Krishna, Rama or other religious figures. It is irrational to think of a selected one to be the only begotten son. Gandhi admitted Jesus as a great teacher of humanity, but not as the only begotten Son of God. He, however, admits that Jesus was the only begotten Son of God for his devotees. Jesus was nearest to God in his time. But this should not be the case with him; his faith in Jesus need not be the faith of Jesus' devotees. He maintained that the only begotten Son of God could be understood and accepted only as the spiritual birth and not as a physical event. Jesus, for him, was nearer to perfection, but not so perfect as to take the place of God.

Gandhi rejected the idea of 'graded divinity' on the criteria of reason. Hindu theology propounds its own theory/theology of incarnation, with its application upon the religious leaders, such as Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha, Rama and Krishna. He does not find much historical data available to decide the case in favor of higher divinity in case of any one of them. But, then, who would qualify to take a case of such magnitude, as he muses: 'to say that Jesus was 99 percent divine, and Mohammed 50 percent and Krishna 10 percent, is to arrogate to oneself a function which really does not belong to me'.<sup>28</sup> In place of 'graded divinity', he agrees with the general Vedantic idea of Jeevan-mukta, 'perfectibility' of human nature which can be as near to perfection, in human life, as possible, but not absolutely perfect as that of God. Human perfection, in his opinion, cannot be equated with the perfection of God; for doing so will deny God's superiority

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<sup>25</sup> (ARAT, p.49: H, April 17, 1937).

<sup>26</sup> (ARAT, p.45: Harijan, cited henceforth as H, March 6, 1937)

<sup>27</sup> (ARAT, p.45: H March 6, 1937)

<sup>28</sup> .(ARAT, p. 48: H, March 6, 1937).

over humans. Presenting his own theory of human perfection, he says: 'Being necessarily limited by the bonds of flesh, we can attain perfection only after dissolution of body. Therefore, God alone is absolutely perfect'.<sup>29</sup> Even then, Gandhi's problem is not yet fully resolved; and he has to differentiate perfection of humans at two levels, human and divine, without working out their co-relation. Possibility of perfection in human life is denied on the ground of flesh-body relationship and passed on to another dimension of life after death where this relationship does not exist.

### **Incarnation, cross and resurrection**

Incarnation brings God among human, and it is a belief that is natural to Indian mind, as natural as Gandhi's assertion that 'he appears in many shapes and forms'<sup>30</sup>. Incarnation, thus, is the limitation wrought upon himself by God, making death, on account of flesh-body relationship, natural to him: 'when he descends to earth, He, of His own accord, limits Himself. Jesus died on the cross because he was limited by the flesh'.<sup>31</sup> It is theologians who propose so many theories with fancy ideas to impute their limitation to God, make him to copy humans and bring Him into their frame of time. The moment we say that God is incarnated in this or that historical concrete instance, the purity of God is defiled because he is now subject to the limitation of matter, time and space. In incarnation, history, imagination and truth get so inextricably mixed up that it is next to impossible to disentangle it.

Gandhi made a distinction between the Jesus of history and Jesus whom Christians believe: In as much as God is omnipresent, he dwells within every human being: all may, therefore, be said to be incarnations of him. Rama and Krishna are called the incarnations of God because we attribute divine qualities to them. In truth they are creations of man's imagination. The truth is that God is a living force. He is the essence of life. He is pure and undefiled consciousness. He is eternal.<sup>32</sup>

Gandhi maintained that there is a difference between the name and reality of God. According to his interpretation, Jesus, whose title was Christ, could not be experienced by a believer. It is Christ as the name for God that could be experienced. This Christ, which is the name or symbol for God, is closer to the conception or imagination of man than the historical, concrete Jesus of Christianity.

Gandhi interpreted the cross and resurrection in symbolic and metaphoric language. He held that, as birth is an eternal event, so is the cross an eternal event in our stormy life. One dare not think of birth without death on the cross. The living Christ means the living cross. Without the cross, life is a living death:

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<sup>29</sup> (ARAT, p. 49; H, April 17, 1937).

<sup>30</sup> (ARAT, p.46: Mahadev Desai: Gandhi in Ceylon, Madras: S. Ganesan, p.85)

<sup>31</sup> (ARAT, p. 49: H, April, 17, 1937)

<sup>32</sup> R. K. Prabhu (compiler): Truth is God (M. K. Gandhi), Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1955, p. 84



Person of Jesus is a living reality in the sense of other prophets and teachers. They affect us because they are still living. Jesus, thus, is not living in a special sense of the word, distinguished from others.<sup>33</sup> He proposes that the claim of Christians that Jesus lives and rules their life can be understood in this sense: 'It is not Jesus of history who really rules the lives of Christians; it is the Jesus of their imagination who does so. The God of my imagination rules my life and not the God of your imagination'<sup>34</sup>.

### **Miracles**

Unlike masses that ascribe divinity to any one who performs miracles, Gandhi refuses to accept 'miracles' as the criteria of divinity. They, he argues, may be illusions created by a magician, and no one would accept anyone who is a magician as savior of the world. Miracles, moreover, are contrary to natural laws; hence, it is irrational to accept them: 'the Laws of Nature are changeless, and there are no miracles in the sense of infringement or interruption of Nature's laws'.<sup>35</sup> The Indian religious tradition and belief, on the other hand, recognizes that humans can have, or can attain miraculous powers through austerity, and as a gift of God. Gandhi, therefore, has no objection in accepting Jesus a Yogi with psychic powers and the one who was filled with the love for humanity. One can clearly see that Gandhi is taking the position of Advaitin in propounding his theory. But he is not an 'Advaitin' of Samkara's mould.

### **Jesus the Christ, the Prince of all Satyagrahis**

Mahatma Gandhi considered Jesus Christ as the Prince of all satyagrahis and often referred to *satyagraha* as to the 'Way of the Cross'. It is in this context, one should look upon his understanding of Jesus as Christ.

Concept of truth, as it is noted, is the key to understand life and works of Mahatma Gandhi. He has subtitled his autobiography as an experiment with truth and had tried to live according to its dictate at whatever cost he had to pay, including the bullet of an assassin. By truth, he meant God, and he described his religion, and his God, as Truth: 'I often described my religion as Truth. Of late, instead of saying God is Truth, I have been saying Truth is God in order more fully to define my religion'<sup>36</sup>. This identification of Truth with God made to assert: 'to me, God is Truth and Love, God is ethics and morality, God is fearlessness. God is the source of light and life and yet He is beyond all these: God is conscience'<sup>37</sup>. Truth is not a personal notion; it does not have any a personal reference; it is universal, and as such, has universal reference: it is not my truth, but is also your truth. By this identification of God of religion with the truth of philosophy and epistemology, morality and ethics, Gandhi broke the ice with those seekers of truth who do not

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<sup>33</sup> Gandhi, All religions are true. p. 64

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, p.65

<sup>35</sup> (ARAT, p. 50: H, April 17, 1937).

<sup>36</sup> Radhakrishnan and Muirhead: contemporary Indian Philosophy, p.21

<sup>37</sup> Young India, 5,8. 1925.

wish to identify themselves with any religion of the world; with those who are agnostics, atheists and do not wish to identify themselves with a particular and organized religion. Truth is anti-thesis of *asatya*, Untruth, falsehood; *asat* means "non-existent"; and *satya* means "that which is". Therefore, 'If untruth does not so much as exist, its victory is out of the question. And Truth being "that which is" can never be destroyed'<sup>38</sup>. Hence he decided to cling to it whatever may befall on him. This insistence upon Truth is *Satyagraha*.

Gandhi coined the term, '*styagraha*, to explain his method of fighting injustices by soul-force. Any fight will involve violence, more so fighting with the injustices and the structures of injustices. To rule out such a possibility, he included '*ahimsa*', non-violence as the essential part of *satyagraha*. His *ahimsa* is not passive, limited to mere abstinence from harming others in thought word and deed of their own, or through others; it is a way of life, expressing love and concern for others, even to enemies. *Satyagraha* is the force of the soul; it is the moral force of a person who is established in Truth and loving concerns for the protection of life of others. As such, it cannot be associated with a weak and cowardice. Not killing a tiger to protect the helpless old, women and children is not *ahimsa*, but to fight and kill the tiger is force of the soul; not to send an old cow to the slaughter house and let her die of natural death is *ahimsa*, but to provide protection and feed is the moral force. It is this principle that gave him a legitimate and effective weapon to use against the unjust structures of political, social and religious life of the country.

*Satya* and *Ahimsa* are great principles for one to regulate his life, but they are mere ideals if they cannot be practiced in life. One often seeks to find someone who has really lived a life in perfect harmony with these principles. Mahatma found that person in Jesus Christ, and his teachings as found in the Sermon of the Mount: ' the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount competes, almost on equal terms, with the Bhagavad-Gita for the domination of my heart. It is that sermon which has endeared Jesus to me....The gentle figure of Christ, so, patient, so kind, so loving, so full of forgiveness that he taught his followers not to retaliate when abused or struck but to turn the other cheek - it was a beautiful example, I thought, of the perfect man'<sup>39</sup>.

### **Jesus in the words of Gandhi<sup>40</sup>**

My regard for the life of Jesus is indeed very great. His ethical teaching, his common sense, his sacrifice, commands my reverence. But I do not accept the orthodox teaching that Jesus was or is God incarnate in the accepted sense, or that he was or is the only Son of God. I do not believe in the doctrine of appropriation of another's merit. His sacrifice is a type and an example for us. Every one of us has to be crucified for salvation.

My interpretation in other words is that Jesus' own life is the key of his nearness to God; that he expressed, as no other could, the spirit and will of God. It is in this sense that I see Him and

<sup>38</sup> C.F.Andrews (ed.): Mahatma Gandhi-His Own Story, p.225.

<sup>39</sup> Stanley Jones, Mahatma Gandhi, Lucknow: LPH, 1963, p.3

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 58, 66, 67

recognize Him as the Son of God... But I do believe that something of this spirit that Jesus exemplified in the highest measure, in the most profound human sense, does exist

An example of this flowering (of the spark of divinity in man) may be found in the figure and in the life of Jesus. I refuse to believe that there now exists or has ever existed a person that has not made use of this example to lessen his sin, even though he may have done so without realizing it. The lives of all have, in some greater or lesser degree, been charged by his presence, his actions, and the words spoken by his divine voice.

And because the life of Jesus has significance and transcendency, to which I have alluded, I believe that he belongs, not only to Christianity, but to entire world, to all races and people; it matters little under what flag, name, or doctrine they may work, profess a faith, or worship a god inherited from their ancestors.

### **Sundry Reflections**

Gandhi brought into focus the fact that people of other faith has right to understand Jesus Christ within their own context and theological circle; they have the right to have faith in Him without being the part of the faith of historical church and institutionalized theological doctrines. It is much later that the theologian took note of this and tried to recognize the Christ incognito or Unknown Christ.

Gandhi has raised a vital question in regard to the presence of Christ among the people of faiths other than Christianity. He maintained that there is the presence and pervasiveness of Christ-like spirit among all the people of our world. He argued that people are saved by the Christ-like spirit no matter where they live and under whatever different names they worship God.

Gandhi's vision of the fundamental structure of reality- *satya* and *ahimsa*, is both intriguing and fascinating. *Ahimsa* as the nature of reality is similar to the vision of the suffering love, which is supremely manifested in the incarnation of God in Jesus. The cross of Christ as the fundamental fact and symbol, reflecting the nature of God in the Christian vision, is quite similar to Gandhi's idea of *ahimsa* as the nature of *satya* or reality.

One can also see that in the vision of reality as *satya*, Gandhi does not indicate any movement of *satya* towards the world of change; movement is ascribed to *ahimsa* only. *Satya* is detached from the world; *ahimsa* is related to the movement of dynamism of the world of experience. Man needs to be changed into *satya* through the process of passing through various stages of *satya*, or relative truths, moving toward the attainment of *satya* by the power of *ahimsa*. For this reason, Jesus remains a *satyagrahi* and not the *satya* itself.

The Gandhian vision of reality points to the ontological relatedness of *satya* and *ahimsa* as the basic structure of reality, because they are the converse and obverse sides of the same reality. But in the existential situation this structure gets disintegrated and *satya* is separated from *ahimsa*. The Christian vision of reality continues to assert that the basic ontological structure of reality is manifested in Jesus Christ.

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