

MAHATMA
GANDHI

TRUTH AND NON-VIOLENCE

DR. FR. HEMANTO PIUS ROZARIO CSC



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My Father & Mother**

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Introduction

Peace is the aim of all human beings. Everyone wants to live in peace and happiness. But looking at the present reality of the world, we see that peace is often, still beyond our reach. It still remains a dream. It is an undeniable fact that we live in a time when peace and harmony in the world, and the ability of human beings to live with each other in freedom and justice are constantly being undermined by religious tensions. Most of the time, these tensions arise out of ignorance, misunderstanding, mistrust, fanaticism or arrogance.

We live in a religiously pluralistic world. All religious scriptures teach human and moral values. All religions of the world claim to be lovers and promoters of peace. Hinduism claims to be a universal religion in search of truth¹. It accepts all religions as truth. Buddhism claims to be a tolerant and compassionate religion². Islam claims to be a religion of peace, with a message of love and harmony. To follow Islam is to submit and to commit one's self to be an obedient, grateful servant of God³. Christianity claims to be the religion of love, peace and truth. The message of Jesus, the Christ, is of love, peace, harmony, tolerance and the self-giving of loving service to all.

Yet, in reality, there is hardly a war, civil war or conflict without religious and ideological catalysts and implications. The birthplaces of the great religions and the prophets of non-violence are not spared from violence and terrorist activities. India, the birthplace of Hinduism and Buddhism, faces many conflicts and communal violence. Innumerable people are killed in the name of religion;

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1. K.L.Seshagiri Rao, *Mahatma Gandhi and Comparative Religion* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1990) p.12-14.
 2. Ven Digalle Mahinda, *Religion, Violence and Peace: Buddhist & Christian Perspective, Dialogue*, (Vol. XXIX 2002), p. 52.
 3. Dr. K.G. Saiyidain, *Islam, The Religion of Peace*, (New Delhi: Islam and the Modern Age society, 1976), p.157.

churches, mosques and temples are attacked. Israel, the birthplace of Jesus, the prophet of non-violence, is replete with violence, religious hatred and inter-communal rivalries. The same situation also exists in Arab countries, the very cradle of Islam, a religion of peace. This situation cries out a challenge to religions to make active efforts toward changing this milieu of violence that endangers humanity..

Dialogue is one of the most effective means of promoting peace and harmony in the world, within the societies, and among religions. Dialogue is not a new concept in our world. The World Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago in 1893, is regarded as the beginning of the international inter-religious movement⁴. It has come to symbolize the aspirations of those who believe that religious people should live in harmony, working together for peace and the welfare of humanity. The terrorist attack of September 11th which destroyed thousands of human lives and brought down the World Trade Center in New York City has changed the world. World political and religious leaders, are rediscovering their roles in making our world more peaceful. In particular, religious leaders realize more than ever the need of inter-religious dialogue as a means of peacemaking.

No religion teaches violence and terrorism. It is a common understanding that much of the violence done in the name of religion has little to do with religion. Religion is often used, misused, and abused in conflicts that have social, economic and political motivations. Likewise, those who get involved in violence often have a poor understanding of their religious faith. In these circumstances, religious leaders through dialogue, can play a greater role in promoting peace and harmony. Hans Küng stresses the importance of religious dialogue, in order to restore peace and harmony:

One cannot repeat often enough the thesis for which there is growing acceptance all over the world; there can be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions. In short, there can be no world peace without religious peace.⁵

4. Marcus Braybrooke, "The Interfaith Movement: The Present Reality" *Vidyajyoti*, (Vol. LVI, No. 4, April 1992), p. 182

5. Hans Kung, *Global Responsibility*, (New York: Cross Road, 1991), p.76
Hans Küng is Professor for Ecumenical Research and Director of the Institute for Ecumenism at the University of Tübingen.

Mahatma Gandhi is known as one of the greatest personalities of the twentieth century. He was a politician, a social reformer, a spiritual leader, as well as a great thinker. Rarely do we experience all of these qualities in a single person. He had deep faith in God, from whom he drew all his power and strength. He was a man of principles. Some of these principles he took as vows in his life. *Satyagraha* and *Ahimsa* were the two core principles in Gandhi's life. He claimed himself to be simply a seeker of Truth. For him, Truth was God. Within Gandhi's concept of God, Truth and Non-violence were inseparable from one another. His life was a constant search for Truth. Truth was his aim and *Ahimsa* was his only means to attain the Truth. *Ahimsa* was his God and Truth was his God.

Gandhi was born as a Hindu, but he believed in the fundamental Truth of all great religions of the world. After long, careful study and experience, Gandhi concluded that all religions are God-given and all religions are true. According to Gandhi, *Lord Ram, Rahim, Allah, Christ, Guru Nanak* etc, are simply different names for the same phenomenon. For Gandhi, there was no difference in their teachings. Different religions are differing means to reach to the one, supreme power, God. Belief in one God is the cornerstone of all religions. For Gandhi, to have deep faith in God meant to accept the brotherhood of mankind and to have equal respect for all religions. Gandhi practiced religion in Truth and Non-violence as he said, "to me religion means Truth and *Ahimsa*."⁶ But Truth is not the exclusive property of any single religion or any single, religious scripture. He did not feel the need for a single universal. He had respect and tolerance for different religions and for the different religious communities.

Gandhi was a man of dialogue. He strictly condemned religious and communal conflict. He promoted religious and communal harmony for the prosperity of the country at large. His vision of religious and communal harmony through dialogue was based on Truth and Non-violence. He believed that if people of all religions faithfully searched for Truth, using the method of Non-violence and

6. Mahatma Gandhi, *Young India*, 6-12-1928. *Young India* was English weekly journal, published from Bombay as a bi-weekly, under Gandhi's supervision from May 7, 1919, and as a weekly from Ahmedabad, with Gandhi as editor from October 8, 1919.

engaging in sincere dialogue, fanaticism, fundamentalism and many violent conflicts emerging from them would diminish and disappear; peace and harmony would be established. Other thinkers, philosophers and reformers had previously preached religious harmony, but Gandhi is the only thinker who sacrificed his life in working toward religious harmony through dialogue based on the twin concepts of Truth and Non-violence.

Part-2

In order to realize the objectives of this study, the researcher has utilized a library research method in data collection. Considering that this research is philosophical in nature, no samplings, no interviews, nor any illustrations are included. Various library and internet materials, such as books, journals and articles, have been essential in gaining a deeper understanding of Gandhi's personality, principles, values, works, and his views on religion and dialogue.

The interpretation, presentation and evaluation of this research are based on primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are those books written by Gandhi himself and his writings compiled by other editors. The secondary sources are those books written by others on Gandhi and his works, and works written by authors on different religions.

The content of this research is divided into Five chapters.

The meanings of *Satyagraha* and *Ahimsa* as viewed by Gandhi through the prism of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam are explored in Chapter One. It claims that the philosophical principles of *Satyagraha* and *Ahimsa* lay a solid foundation for inter-religious dialogue.

Chapter Two will explain how Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam view the existence of other religious faiths. It discusses at length the concepts of inter-religious dialogue and its practice through the perspective of these four major world religions.

Gandhi's view of religion is explained in the first part of Chapter Three. Gandhi viewed every religion as paths to God (Truth). The practice of religion is to search for Truth through the means of *Ahimsa* and morality. Readers will see how Gandhi viewed other religions in the second part of the fourth chapter. Though Gandhi

was born a Hindu, he entered into the heart of all religions and concluded that all religions were true and all religions preached non-violence, leading men and women to the same end, God (Truth). He had no problem dealing with and understanding people of other religions, for he could see unity in the diversity of religions.

Chapter Four begins with an explanation of how Gandhi's philosophy of *Satyagraha* and Ahimsa become ground for inter-religious dialogue. In the latter part of Chapter Five inter-religious dialogue will be explored as an avenue to promote for peace and harmony in our religiously pluralistic world. The summary and conclusion based on the findings of the research will be posed in Chapter Five.

Part-3

This work would have been remained an unattainable dream, if it had not been inspired and helped by significant persons in order that this study is brought to meaningful completion.

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CHAPTER ONE

MEANING OF *SATYAGRAHA* AND *AHIMSA*

A. Introduction

The Greek philosopher Aristotle said, “All men by nature desire to know”.¹ To know is to perceive the full truth. But what is truth? Beyond the obvious words such as honesty, sincerity and certainty, no single word or a single sentence can describe Truth. Truth is often viewed as reality or the naked facts; yet, naked facts can be very subjective. Truth is such a simple word. It is a powerful word. Yet, the depth of its meaning is elusive. It is not so easy to define. According to Frederick William Robertson,

Truth is fundamental or spiritual reality, the manifested, veritable essence of a matter. It is the reality that lies at the basis of appearance. Absolute truth is indestructible and eternal. It is infinite and self-existent. It is vast and deep. It is intelligent and beyond the realm of complete experience and understanding.²

Over the course of human history, different religions have served as the means to communicate Divine revelation to human life. Likewise, humanity has utilized religions as vehicles in the search for the Ultimate Reality or Ultimate Truth. Some of these religions have survived for thousands of years and are followed by hundreds of millions of people. One presumes that these religious followers have found truth in their respective religions. Otherwise, these religions would not have spread and lasted over time.

All religions have truth and are searching for the Ultimate Truth. This Ultimate Truth is God; a reality that goes beyond the specific language of any particular culture or religion. Hindus call this reality

1. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book 1, 1.

2. Frederick William, *The Love of the Truth*, <http://www.annemurchison.com>

Atma, to Buddhists it is Buddha Nature or *Nirvana*, to Christians the Ultimate Truth is called God who Muslims call *Allah*. These different religions teach their followers the means and the paths to follow in their search for the Ultimate Truth. Though they utilize different words to name and explain these means or pathways, such as *Ahimsa*, Love and Compassion, in essence all are the same.

B. Hindu View of Truth and Non-violence

1.Hindu View of Truth

To a Western thinker, philosophy is an intellectual inquiry into the ultimate cause and law of all things. In other words, it is an intellectual speculation regarding the nature of the ultimate cause of all things. The purpose, however, of a Hindu's philosophical system, which is called *Darshana* ("a vision"), is not only to know about Reality, but also to see Reality, to intuitively experience and gain a soul-perception of the Truth. That's why Indian philosophy is called, *Darshana* ("a vision"), the vision of the Truth or Ultimate Reality.³

Hindus say that it is not enough just to believe in God, man has to make an effort to see God as well. One of the best ways to see God is to think of Him/Her as person. Hindu religion and philosophy recognize the authority of the Vedas, the oldest religious scriptures. These scriptures of Hinduism teach man to worship God in different forms of expression. While these forms may differ for people, it is the one and the same God who is worshiped. *Brahma* is worshiped as the creator of the universe, *Vishnu* as the preserver of the universe, and *Shiva* as the destroyer of the universe. In the *Upanishad* all the gods of Hinduism are reduced to one God, that is *Brahman*, the supreme essence of the universe.⁴

There are three major schools of thought in Hinduism. These are *Advaita* ("Non-Dualism"), *Visishtadvaita* ("Qualified Monism") and *Dvaita* ("Dualism"). Sankara was one of the most prominent *Vedantic* philosophers in Hinduism and is recognized as the profounder of *Advaita*. According to Sankara, *Brahman* is the only

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3. Magdalena Alonso-Villaba, *Philosophy of the East*, (Manila, UST Publication, 1996), p.6.
 4. Madhu Bazaz Wangu, *Hinduism, World Religions*, (New York: Facts On File, 1991), p. 36

Reality. The *Brahman* is unborn and uncreated. He does not create; He does not cause. His nature is *Sacchidananda*, Existence, Consciousness and Bliss.⁵

But, one might ask, why is it that we are able to see many beings but not the *Brahman*? According to Sankara, the material world is only a superficial appearance while there is no change in reality. We see many beings and not the *Brahman* because of *Avidya* or Ignorance. It is *Maya* (“illusion”) that veils Reality, *Brahman*, and makes us see, instead, the many varied illusory worlds. Thus, Reality reflects itself in the world as many complex contradictory visions. This is only temporary or relative reality, valid until men become aware of the Absolute Reality, *Brahman*.

Some Hindus believe that the Ultimate Reality is formless, but with qualities. They contend that the best way they can describe God is as Truth and Love. As Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba writes:

When you seek the Truth, you are seeking God. Truth is God. Truth exists, so too, God exists. Truth must be considered as life giving as breath itself. Just as a person with no breath in him becomes useless, life without Truth is useless and becomes a dwelling place of strife and grief. Believe that there is nothing greater than Truth; nothing more precious, nothing sweeter and nothing more lasting.⁶

If man discovers the real nature of these qualities, he discovers God.

While some Hindus believe that God is formless, most do not. This majority holds that God is both with and without form. Ramakrishna explained this concept best. He held that there is no contradiction in thinking of God as being both with and without form. To demonstrate this, he gave an example of ice and water, holding that they are the same thing – ice with form and water without form. If man can realize his divine nature with the help of an image, it cannot be considered a sin. Therefore, for Hindus in the

5. Villaba, *Philosophy of the East*, p. 61

6. Sri Sathya Sai Baba, *Truth*, <http://www.eaisai.com>. Sri Sathya Sai Baba is a highly revered spiritual leader and world teacher who inspired people to respect all religion. He officially declared his mission in 1940 at the age of 14. His Ashram is in Southern India.

search for Ultimate Reality or Truth, man searches not from error to truth, but from truth to truth, from lower truth to higher truth.

According to Hindu religion, Truth is God. When man seeks The Truth, he is seeking God. To discover the Truth is the unique mission of man. Man is a mixture of Maya (“illusion”) and Madhava (“God”); the Maya throws a mist, which hides the Madhava. That’s why Hindus hold that it is foolish to search for the Truth somewhere other than in one’s self. To know one’s self is to know the Truth. The Truth, the Ultimate Reality, dwells as the inner Self (“Atma”) of every particle of God’s creation, animate or inanimate. As the Upanishad describes,

Knowing that supreme Self, which is
Formless, yet dwelling within bodies,
Permanent in the midst of the fleeting,
Great and all-pervading,
The wise man transcends all grief.”⁷

For Hindus, Truth as absolute is an eternal quality. The wisdom and knowledge of the Vedas are derived from this Truth. Truth is the highest *Dharma*. This *Dharma* consists not of belief or in the attempts and struggles to believe a certain doctrine or dogma, but rather in realizing, in being and becoming. The whole object of the *Dharma* system is to become perfect by constant struggle, to become divine, to reach and see God. In reaching and seeing God, man is becoming perfect, as God is perfect. This God is Absolute Truth; He is love; He is morality; He is wisdom; He is unchanged. Man seeks after this Truth. As Bhagavan Baba says,

The Universe is dependent on Truth. If there is no Truth, there is no Universe. Truth is of eternal quality. No one can change it. Nor hide it. Truth is God. All wealth, all riches emerge from truth only. God is the embodiment of Truth. Truth alone is God’s abode. *Dharma* permanently lives in Truth. The Vedas, the repository of knowledge and wisdom emanate from Truth. Truth alone is the royal path. Truth is knowledge - infinity, *Brahman*. Wherever Truth is followed, there lives *Dharma*. There is no *Dharma* higher

7. *Katha Upanishad*, 1, ii,22

than Truth. There is no morality higher than Truth. Through Truth, you can experience love; through love you can visualize Truth.⁸

Thus, the aim of Hindu philosophy and religion is a constant search for the Truth, the Ultimate Reality who is God, *Brahman*. *Muksha*, or immortality, is to realize the Truth, the Ultimate Reality.

2.Hindu View of *Ahimsa* (Non-violence)

In Sanskrit, *Himsa* (“violence”) means doing harm or causing injury. When the “a” prefix is added, it negates the word. Therefore, *Ahimsa* means abstaining from causing harm or injury. It is non-injury, in word, thought, and/or deed. The roots of *Ahimsa* are found in the Vedas, Upanishads, *Dharma* Shastras, Yoga Sutras and other sacred books of Hinduism.

Hindu philosophy looks at life and nature positively. For Hindus nothing is intrinsically evil; rather, everything is sacred. One of the aspects of *Ahimsa* is harmony with the self and nature. Peace is the product of harmonious living with nature. People who respect all life and live in harmony with nature find peace. This is an important teaching of the Vedas.

Peace be the earth, peaceful the ether, peaceful heaven, peaceful the waters, peaceful the herbs, peaceful the trees. May all Gods bring me peace. May there be peace through these invocations of peace. With these invocations of peace, which appease everything, I render peaceful whatever here is terrible, whatever here is cruel, whatever here is sinful. Let it become auspicious, let everything be beneficial to us.⁶

Hindu traditions oppose *Himsa* (“violence”) for many reasons. The Hindu mind is strongly impacted by beliefs in the law of *karma* and reincarnation. Hindus know well that any thought, feeling or action sent out from them to another will return to them. What man has done to others will be done to him, if not in this life then in the next life. Hindus strongly believe that violence committed against others will return to the perpetrator by a cosmic process that is unerring.

8. *Bhagavan Baba, Truth*, <http://www.eaisai.com>

6. Atharva Veda: X. 191.4

All Hindus also believe in the oneness of soul. The individual soul (“atma”) is separated from the Universal Soul (“Atman”), which is *Brahman*, only for a time. It is again united to the Universal Soul after a process of self-purification, for the individual soul is one with the Universal Soul. It follows, from this belief in the oneness of soul, that to harm others is to harm oneself. It is the self itself that is corrupted when the self intends to corrupt. When the self intends to kill or does kill, it is the self it intends to kill or kills. Love, non-violence, good conduct and the law of *Dharma* define the Hindu path. Hinduism explains that the soul is reincarnated until all *karmas* are resolved and God’s realization is attained. The Bhagavad-Gita gives these values and the law of *Dharma*.

The Lord said, ‘Fearlessness, purity of heart, steadfastness in knowledge and devotion, almsgiving, self-control and sacrifice, study of the scriptures, austerity and uprightness, non-violence, truth, freedom from anger, renunciation, tranquility, aversion to slander, compassion to all living beings, freedom from covetousness, gentleness, modesty, courage, patience, fortitude, purity and freedom from malice and overweening conceit- these belong to him who is born to the heritage of the God’s, O Arjuna.’¹⁰

These convictions are the basis on which Hinduism opposes *Himsa* and promotes *Ahimsa*.

In the Hindu tradition *Ahimsa* is considered the greatest *Dharma* or virtue. It is the practice of non-violence and respect for all living things. Hindus believe that all living things are of the same spirit. Therefore, they believe that animals and humans alike should be treated with respect and reverence. Violence, on the other hand, results in bad *karma* and may lead to an unfavorable rebirth. *Ahimsa* is not cowardice; rather, it is wisdom, the cumulative knowledge of the existing divine laws of reincarnation, *karma*, *Dharma*, the pervasiveness and sacredness of things. All these are blended together in the psyche or soul of a Hindu. As *Mahabharata* tells:

Ahimsa is the highest dharma. Ahimsa is the best tapas. Ahimsa is the greatest gift. Ahimsa is the highest self-control. Ahimsa is the highest sacrifice. Ahimsa is the highest power. Ahimsa is the

10. *Bhagavad Gita*: Chapter 16.

highest friend. Ahimsa is the highest truth. Ahimsa is the highest teaching.¹¹

Ahimsa begins at home. When *Himsa* or harmfulness arises in the home, it must be settled as soon as possible. Parents should discipline themselves in the spirit of *Ahimsa* and train their children in the spirit of *Ahimsa*. For, if parents cannot control themselves, one cannot expect it from children.

Man disciplines himself in soul force by practicing meditation to uproot jealousy from his heart, for jealousy is the root cause of *Himsa*. Soul force is based on oneness, humility, peace, compassion, and love. *Swami Vivekananda* says,

The test of ahimsa is the absence of jealousy. The man whose heart never cherishes even the thought of injury to anyone, who rejoices at the prosperity of even his greatest enemy, that man is the bhakta, he is the yogi, he is the guru of all.¹²

Those who attain a personal peace by controlling the instinctive nature of *Himsa* become the spiritual leaders of human society. They are able to direct the masses because of their soul force, rather than mind force.

It is evident from the above discussion that Hindu philosophy and religion are means in the search for the Ultimate Truth, the Universal Soul, the *Brahman*. He is one and without a second. The individual soul or *atma* is part of the Universal Soul, separated by ignorance or *maya*. According to the law of *Dharma*, the *atma* strives to attain *Muksha* or liberation. *Ahimsa* is the highest *Dharma* through which liberation can be attained. Truth is the End and *Ahimsa* is the means to attain the Truth. The mission of man is to seek the Truth following the *Dharma* of *Ahimsa*, love and compassion.

11. *Mahabharata* XVIII: 116.37-41. Mahabharata is one of two main long epics of India.

12. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, Vol. VI, 1956), p.78.

Swami Vivekananda was a prominent modern Advaita Vedanta Philosopher in India who was Hindu delegate in The World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, 1893, and made greatest impact on the American audience delivering a speech on Hinduism.

C. Buddhist View of Truth and Non-violence

1. Buddhist View of Truth

Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, was not a God or god, but a human person, who was enlightened by the eternal Truth. Buddha was a seeker of Truth. As a young man, he spent six years searching and meditating. In recognizing the true nature of mind, he became Buddha - the “awakened one”.

Buddhism is considered as a non-theistic religion, because it has no God who creates everything and to whom prayer and sacrifice can be offered. At the time of Buddha, many people were deeply interested in philosophical issues inherited from *Upanisadic* philosophy. But Buddha was not interested or rather, was silent, regarding metaphysical questions, such as, Ultimate Reality, the nature of soul, life after death and the origin of the universe. He was silent not because he was indifferent or ignorant of them, but because he followed the middle path toward Absolute Truth that avoided the extremes of hedonism and asceticism. In introducing his moral and ethical teachings, the Buddha did use the existing religious terms current in India at the time. But in his teachings Buddha gave very rational and unique meanings and interpretations to already existing religious terms (terms such as *Dharma*, *Karma*, *Nirvana*, *Moksha*, *Niraya*, *Samsara*, and *Atma*).

Almost all religions are based on faith, faith in dogma or in some higher being, but Buddha based his teaching on seeing, knowing and understanding, not on faith in an absolute sense. Buddha taught his disciples *Dharma*, but this *Dharma* was not a set of dogma given by god as was the belief in ancient times. Rather, this *Dharma* was eternal; it was the “law of the universe”. Buddha discovered this *Dharma* and taught his disciples to use it as a means to escape from suffering and misery, and at the same time to improve human values. This *Dharma* was, and is, known as the great moral and ethical teaching of Buddha.¹³

The most important teachings in Buddha’s *Dharma* are known as the Four Noble Truths. The universal Buddha revealed these four

13. Alfredo P. Co, *Philosophy of the Compassionate Buddha*, (Manila: UST Publication, 2003), p.45.

noble truths, discovered by his own intuitive knowledge, to the deluded world. . They are eternal Truths and cannot be changed with time. These Four Noble Truths are:

a. There is Suffering (*Dukkha*)

According to this first truth, whatever life one leads, it is by nature a life of suffering. Everyone is affected by suffering. At best, one can only find temporary happiness and pleasure in life.

b. The Causes of Suffering

Ultimately, suffering and the experience of suffering comes from the human mind. Man's central problems are problems of the conscious mind. Problems of desire, anger and ignorance lead man to negative action, which causes suffering to others and one's self.

c. There is an End to Suffering:

This is the most positive message of Buddhism. Although suffering is always present in cyclic existence, we can eradicate suffering and enter *Nirvana*, which is a state beyond all suffering.

d. The True Path, or Eight-fold Noble Path:

The Fourth Noble Truths provides an Eight-fold Path to control our body and mind in order to end our suffering and problems. This Eight-fold Path consists of: Right View, Right Speech, Right Actions, Right Attitude, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration.

Buddha, as a seeker after Truth, found his mission in life: to teach the Truth he discovered from *Dharma*. This is an eternal and exclusive Truth. Only in following this Truth can one become his follower. He said:

My mission was to teach the truth. Gautama Siddhartha will know death, but Buddha will live, for Buddha is Truth, and Truth is Eternal. He who has faith in the Way and lives Truth is my disciple, and I shall guide him. The truth will spread all over the earth. For a while error will veil the light, but in due course another Buddha will arise, and he will make known the selfsame eternal truth which I have taught.¹⁴

14. Meuter, de Gladys, *Your God is my God*, (India: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1951). Cited from *Buddha's Gospel of Good Life*, Compiled

According To Nagarjuna, a well-known Buddhist scholar, the *Dharma* taught by Buddha wholly depends on two truths. One is conventional, worldly truth and the other one is Ultimate Truth.¹⁵ To grasp the true teaching of Buddha it is very important to understand these two truths.

According to the *Prasangika-Madhyamika* system, all phenomena that we manifestly perceive have two modes of being. One is nominal or the conventional entity of the phenomena; the other is its final mode of being. When an object is found by a valid cogniser distinguishing a conventionality, it is a conventional truth; when an object is found by a valid cogniser distinguishing a final nature it is an ultimate truth. In other words, whatever appears and is not perceived by the enlightened mind (Buddha's enlighten mind) is called conventional or relative truth. Emptiness and true cessations are Ultimate Truth, and all others are conventional truth. When all the illusions and ordinary perceptions are dissolved, when the mind is free from confusion of ordinary perception, this is called Absolute or Ultimate Truth.¹⁶ All phenomena are the unity of appearance and emptiness. When one realizes the unity of appearance and emptiness and also realizes the undifferentiable state of appearance and emptiness, such a person has the thought and understanding of Buddha. When these two truths are realized in their own order, this state is called non-dual wisdom or *Nirvana*.

According to Buddhism, the Absolute Truth is that there is nothing absolute in the world. Everything is relative, conditioned, and impermanent. There is no unchanging, everlasting, absolute substance such as Self, Soul or *Atma*. The only Ultimate Truth is *Nirvana*, which is neither a cause nor an effect. A person who has attained enlightenment is a Buddha who has realized *Nirvana*. *Nirvana* is the goal of Buddhism. *Nirvana* is, according to Narada,

by Rameesh and Ananda Kasturi at <http://sss.vn.un/buddha2.htm>. 30.05.1999.

15. Gyatso, Tenzin, *The Buddhism of Tibet and the key to the middle way*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1975), p.31. Nagarjuna is the founder of Madhyamika or the Middle way from the second century.
16. *Ibid.* p.32

From the metaphysical point of view, Nirvana is the complete eradication of suffering, from the point of view of psychology, Nirvana is the total eradication of egoism and from the ethical point of view, Nirvana is the uprooting of lust, hatred and ignorance.¹⁷

Buddha did not recognize the existence of God, but he did believe in Truth, which is embodied in creation. One does not have to search for the truth outside of one's self. As Buddha said,

The gift of the Truth beats all other gifts. The flavour of the Truth beats all other tastes. The joy of the Truth beats all other Joys, and the cessation of desire conquers all suffering.¹⁸

One, who has realized the Truth, *Nirvana*, is the happiest being in the world. He is free from all desire, hatred, ignorance conceit and pride. He is pure and gentle, full of love and compassion and enjoys perfect mental health. He lives fully in the present. Every one is a potential Buddha, but there are only a few historical Buddhas, Gautama is the fourth.¹⁹

2. Buddhist View of Non-violence

Swami Vivekananda, one of the great thinkers in modern India, was impressed with Buddha's teachings on compassion and non-violence. According to him, Buddha taught high philosophy; yet, Buddha had great sympathy for the lowest being. His philosophy was a combination of heart and brain. Recognizing the Buddha's noble example in this matter, Swami Vivekananda said in his lectures on *karma-yoga*:

The whole human race has produced but one such person, such high philosophy, such wide sympathy. The great philosopher, preaching the highest philosophy, yet has the deepest sympathy for the lowest animals, and never puts forward a claim for himself. He is the ideal *Karma* Yogi, acting entirely without motive, and the history of humanity shows him to have been the greatest man ever born, beyond compare, the greatest combination of heart and brain that ever existed.²⁰

17. Narada, *The Buddha and His teachings*, (Malaysia: Buddhist Missionary Society, 1988), p.555.

18. Dhammapada: 354

19. Villaba, *Philosophy of the East*, p. 97

20. Swami Vivekananda, *Karma-yoga*, (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2002), p.131

In Buddhism compassionate love is the basis of all moral and ethical conduct. It promotes the values of social justice, social welfare, equality, brotherhood, tolerance, understanding, respect for all life, respect for others, respect for others' points of view and many other social and spiritual values. All of these values have their roots in compassionate love. Based on the noble principle of *Ahimsa*, Buddhism has always been a religion of peace. This religion's long history (of over two thousand-five hundred years) remains free of the taint of religious wars, religious persecutions and inquisitions. In this respect, Buddhism stands unique in the history of religions.

According to Buddhism, *Ahimsa* is not limited to physically not hurting living beings. It is also inclusive of the non-hurting of other living beings in thought, word and deed. *Ahimsa* is not only a single virtue; it is also a combination of many virtues, such as tolerance, forgiveness, love, compassion, fortitude, justice, renunciation, and truthfulness. Buddha taught *Ahimsa* in the following words:

Do not that which is evil; do only good; Purify the pollution of the mind: That is the teaching of the Buddha.

Do not hate him who hates you. Rather live without hate. Amidst those who hate, Live in compassion without hate.

Overcome anger by compassion, greed by generosity, lies by the truth and evil by good.²¹

The aim of Buddhism is the realization of Truth, *Nirvana*. *Nirvana* is the destruction of human passion, greed, hate and delusion. Violence has no place here (*Nirvana*); it cannot exist. Non-violence is the *Dharma* and the means to attain the Truth. Buddha taught Non-violence as the highest *Dharma*. To follow the *Dharma* one has to refrain from causing any harm, or violence. To give one example of this in practice, Buddha summoned his step-brother Ananda to impart to him his final message. Ananda was the son of Gautami (Buddha's step-mother). Placing his palm on the head of the younger brother, Buddha said:

My dear child! I came to the world to teach the Truth. If anyone asks, 'Where is God?' the answer is: 'He is everywhere'. Truth is

21. Chiko Komatsu, *The Way to Peace, The Life and Teaching of the Buddha*, Trans. by Gaynor Jenke Sekimori (Kyoto, Kozokan Publishing Co., 1989), P. 229.

God. Speak the Truth. Do not harm anyone. Recognise that the highest *Dharma* is non-violence (*Ahimsa*). The supreme duty is refraining from causing harm to anyone. This truth is proclaimed in the scriptures in the exhortation: "Speak the Truth. Speak what is pleasing (Sathyam bruyaath; priyam bruyaath;) Thus, pleasing speech is declared as a supreme duty."²²

According to Buddha there is no greater happiness than peace. The ultimate goal for a Buddhist is to reach the peaceful state of *Nirvana* and the means to reach this goal must be peaceful. To be a Buddhist, one is first of all required to observe the Five Precepts, to insure that one does not take advantage of oneself or others. These five precepts, known as *Pancasila*, serve as moral guidelines and are the minimum moral obligations of a lay Buddhist. These *Pancasila* are based on *Ahimsa*, practiced in thought, word and deed. They reiterate the prevention of violence in any form.

- a. Not to destroy life: Not only human life, but all life.
- b. Not to steal: One can receive only what is given generously.
- c. Not to commit adultery: Abstention from immoral sexual behavior.
- d. Not to tell lies: Such as, false speech, spreading rumors, gossiping, speaking ill of others.
- e. Not to take intoxicating drink: As it causes self-destruction in mind and body.

Buddhism further teaches the positive practice of *Ahimsa* with five virtues known as the *Pancadharmas*. These five virtues are:

1. Loving-kindness or Compassion
2. Patience in the right means of livelihood
3. Abstention from immoral sexual behavior
4. Truthfulness
5. Watchfulness

According to Hajime Nakamura *Ahimsa* has been an outstanding characteristic of Buddhism from the very beginning. The aim of Buddha was to seek the Truth. Buddha taught to arrive at the truth not by excluding its opposites as falsehood but by including them as another form of the same truth. It is often hard to have firm conviction and at the same time to be tolerant, but Buddha and many

22. Sri Sathya Sai Baba, *Sanathana Sarathi*, (Prasanthi Nilayan, India: Sathya Sai Books & Publication trust, Feb.5, 1998)

of his followers showed such tolerance. Importantly, they showed their liberal attitudes toward other religions.²³

As Edward Conze has noted, the practice of the Principle of *Ahimsa* protected Buddha and his early followers. If a Buddha was insulted, the Buddha would see little reason to torture or to kill the person who 'insulted' him. When Buddhas are insulted, why become indignant? Buddhas are not touched by blasphemies.²⁴

Conflict is a reality in society. While conflict can be positive or negative, constructive or destructive, we often tend to become fixated on our attachment to our own views, refusing to critique, adapt or let them go and we tend to blame, distrust and even hate others in conflict situations. One thing we need to keep in mind is that *Ahimsa* is not only a means to solve our conflicts, but that *Ahimsa* is a way of life and the only means to attain the Ultimate Truth, *Nirvana*. It is the highest *Dharma*. To practice *Ahimsa* one must cultivate mindfulness, patience, compassion, truthfulness, tolerance, and respect for all living beings throughout the whole of life, not just in situations of conflict.

D. Christian View of Truth and Non-violence

1. Christian View of Truth

Christianity was founded by Jesus about two thousands years ago in Roman-occupied Palestine. This religion is based on the truth of the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus. The Holy Bible is the source book of Christian theology and philosophy. Jesus defined the concept of God in Christianity. The Christian God is a triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus is the only Son of God, who was incarnated to save all human beings. Through Jesus, we not only know the Son but also the Father and the Holy Spirit (John 1:18). Jesus also acknowledged God as One, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as he declared, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is One" (Mark 12:29). Jesus revealed the true nature of God as Love and Truth. Love and Truth are not only qualities or attributes; they are the very nature of God.

23. Olivera, George, *On Toleration: From Theory to Social Praxis*, (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1998), p.106

24. *Ibid.* p.106

In the Bible, Truth is a very important doctrine, and is the basis of all other doctrines. But Truth is not an impersonal idea or concept. The Bible teaches that God is the final and Ultimate Truth. He is Truth and He is “the God of Truth” (Psa. 31:5). In the Old Testament, the term for truth is “emeth”, which means firmness, stability, and faithfulness.²⁵ God is called the God of Truth, because people rely on God who is ever faithful. (Deut.32:4). Truth is not merely something to think about, but it is also something to be done. God does truth forever (Ps. 146:6). Truth is a quality of God’s nature. God’s Truth is the only constant and unchanging reality.

Man cannot determine truth, because God alone is truth and man is not God. But, Jesus is God, God incarnate. He, therefore, is also the incarnation of Truth. As he said, “I am the Truth” (John 14:6). God not only speaks the truth, but He is Truth. He is the source of all truth and all truth is God’s truth. It is only God who defines truth. The Holy Bible is the Word of Truth, because it is God’s word.

How do people know the Truth? They receive the truth from God. God reveals truth through nature, scripture and particularly, through Jesus. As Jesus said, “I am telling you the truth: whoever hears my words and believes in him who sent me has eternal life” (John 5:24). So the first step to know the truth is faith.

To believe in God is to submit one’s mind and heart to Him (2 Cor. 10:5). God gives wisdom to the humble heart, as it is said, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Ps. 111:10). Discernment is the key aspect of wisdom. God reveals the truth and man discerns the truth through the help of wisdom. Since human beings are finite and sinful, unable to see things as they really are, they need God’s wisdom. The human becomes truly wise in and through God’s word.

Postmodernism and humanism teach that truth is relative. Each person invents his own truth. This is wrong for the Christian, because it denies the absolute truth. Truth is absolute because it is rooted in God. God is absolute Truth, who does not change. As in the gospel, where a young man came to Jesus and addressed him as “good

25. Clarke, Paul Barry & Linzey Andrew, (ed) *Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, (London: Theology and Society Routledge, 1996), p.679.

teacher”, Jesus immediately directed him to God saying, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone” (Mark 10:17).

In Christ’s teaching Truth sometimes appears as paradox. As Jesus said, “For whoever wants to save his own life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.” Our human mind may see contradiction in this or may not be able to grasp how these two statements can be simultaneously true. Human beings are finite and cannot see reality as a whole or are unable to see the relatedness between what God said and what God made. Truth, however, does not contradict itself. It contradicts error.

It is here that man encounters the concept of mystery. The absolute appears to us as mystery. The concept of the Triune God is a mystery. We know there is one God, but how he reveals himself as three people remains a great mystery. So, the truth Christianity preaches is God, who is Absolute Truth, revealed by a living person, Jesus, who is himself God incarnate. As James W. Douglass writes:

The truth proclaimed by Christianity is the truth of a living person. The claim of the Gospel is that God’s truth has become incarnate and redemptive, has been revealed in the person and life of Jesus. Christian truth is Jesus Christ; the incarnate truth of Jesus remains present in the mystical identity between Christ and the faithful, whoever, and wherever these may be. At the center of any definition of Christian truth is therefore its nature as incarnation, a truth whose fullness is the life of Jesus and whose continuing presence is that same life as given in the Holy Spirit (but resisted by sin) in his followers.²⁶

2. Christian View of Non-violence

Jesus, the founder of Christianity, was a strong advocate of Non-violence. The gospel gives a beautiful picture of Jesus as the incarnation of non-violence. He came into the world to bring peace, to make peace, so that all people on earth may be liberated from unrest, injustice and darkness. He came to share the love of God with all people. As the gospel states: “For God loved the world so much that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the

26. Ellsberg, Robert, (ed), *Gandhi on Christianity*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), p. 101.

world to be its judge, but to be its savior” (John 3:16-17). The incarnation of Jesus reveals to the world that God is a loving God, a forgiving God. Non-violence is His response toward human sinfulness. The incarnation reveals that God values human life; at the same time it challenges all human beings to be people of non-violence. It teaches humanity to rule out all condemnation, hatred, injustice and killing.

From the very first day of his public life, Jesus, as prophet of non-violence, called people to repent from their violent attitudes and to embrace God’s nonviolent reign of peace. He declared, “The right time has come and the Kingdom of God is near! Turn away from your sins and believe the Good news!”(Mark 1:15). This is the Good News of God’s nonviolent love, compassion and peace and of His Kingdom of love, truth and justice. This is the Good News announced in the Gospel of Luke, when Jesus read from the book of prophet Isaiah in the synagogue,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people (Lk. 4:18-19).

For Jesus, the best way to worship the living God was the nonviolent way. The way one offered sacrifice to God was even more important than the actual sacrifice.

...So if you are about to offer your gift to God at the altar and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar, go at once and make peace with your brother, and then come back and offer your gift to God (Lk.5:23-24).

Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount begins with the beatitudes (Mat. 5:3-12), a list of the signs or blessings of the Kingdom of God. Within this Kingdom all values are formed out of a nonviolent way of being and as a result, form the core of the way of non-violence. Being a disciple in this Kingdom demands of one purity of heart, mercy, peace and justice. Living this nonviolent way of life brings the Kingdom into its fullness, where all violence, war and injustice cease to exist.

The nonviolent teaching of Jesus is a positive and an active force. Jesus' teaching on non-violence goes beyond simply not killing. As He declared: "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not kill and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment'. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment" (Mt. 5:21-23). Jesus taught his disciples to be peacemakers, to forgive and love their enemies, to turn the other cheek, to pray for those who persecute them. He taught his disciples, to practice unconditional forgiveness, "Not seven times, but seventy times seven" (Mt. 18:21), as he responded to Peter.

This is how the gospel portrays Jesus as the ultimate teacher of peace and justice, the great master of non-violence, not only in words but also in deeds. He, therefore, becomes a model of non-violence in the world through his very being and actions.

In Catholic Church teaching, Christian philosophers Ambrose Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, who lived during war and the Church's involvement in war – for example, the fall of the Roman Empire and the Crusades - created and developed the just war theory out of the situation in which they lived. According to this theory, a war is just when legitimate public authority calls it, when there exists a just cause and when there is a right intention and.²⁷ Of course, these principles were subject to interpretation and were often abused to undertake military adventures. In time, just war theory has come into question; even Thomas Aquinas later took the position that war is always sinful, even though he felt that it might have to be waged at times for a just cause. The world context has changed with the possibility of nuclear war and complete annihilation. Many hold that because of this, just war theory can hold only for conventional war. At the time of the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic Church was totally opposed to Atomic war and even taught that war as a legitimate defense was to be seen as a last resort:

As long as the danger of war remains and there is no competent and sufficiently powerful authority at the international level, governments cannot be denied the right to legitimate defense once

27. Fausto B. Gomes, O.P., "The Just War Theory, A Path to Peace", *Theology Week*, (2002), p. 147.

every means of peaceful settlement has been exhausted. Therefore, government authorities and others who share public responsibility have the duty to protect the welfare of the people entrusted to their care and to conduct such grave matters soberly.²⁸

Today, some claim that just war theory is totally unacceptable, for war itself is immoral. Pope John Paul II condemned the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center in the United States of America, saying it was a barbaric attack. He also asked for solidarity with the attack's victims. He spoke of peace, not of retaliation or war. He called all to pray and fast for a peace that comes from true justice and love. At a later date, while addressing the Diplomatic Corps on January 10, 2002, he John Paul II acknowledged that acts of terrorist killing not only raised important questions about what measures were appropriate to utilize in the struggle against terrorism. He said,

The legitimate fight against terrorism, of which the abhorrent attacks of last September are the most appalling expression, has once again let the sound of arms be heard. Barbarous aggressions and killings raised not only the question of legitimate defense but also issues such as the most effective means of eradicating terrorism, the search for factors underlying such acts, and the measures to be taken to bring about a process of "healing" in order to overcome fear and to avoid evil being added to evil, violence to violence.²⁹

E. Islamic View of Truth and Non-violence

1. Islamic View of Truth

The Prophet Muhammad is the founder of Islam. The *Qur'an* and the *Hadith* are the two main sources of Islamic philosophy. The holy book revealed to Prophet Muhammad is known as *al-Qur'an*. It is not Muhammad, but the *Qur'an*, which is the heart of Islam. Prophet Muhammad explains the teaching of *al-Qur'an* in words and deeds. The collection of all these words and deeds is known as *al-Hadith*³⁰.

28. Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 79

29. John Paul II, *Address to the Diplomatic Corps: January 10, 2002:*
http://www.vatican.va/holyfather/johnpaul_ii

30. Saiyed Abdul Hai, *Muslim Philosophy*, (Dhaka: Islamic Foundation, 1982), P.8.

Like every orthodox religion, Islam contains Truth and also provides the means to attain the Truth. The *Qur'an* commands one to search for Truth. It emphasizes a particular aspect of Truth that is in conformity with the spiritual and psychological needs of human beings. It is the means which binds man to the Truth. Like other orthodox religions, Islam emphasizes the relation between man and God, or the relative and the Absolute. God is the Absolute Truth and man is relative. It is man's responsibility to come to realize the truth that only God is God and He is the Absolute Truth.³¹ To love Truth is to love God who is Truth; one of His names being the Truth.

Fethullah Gulen, a leading Turkish Islamic thinker and scholar, claims that one of the essential problems of human life today is the need to find a lawful and correct criterion for truth. According to him truth can be determined only by Truth, which is by God. Man's duty is to search for the truth. He writes,

It is rare for even two or three people to agree on the truth of even a single subject. If the rich and the powerful decide what the truth is then their 'truth' will exclude or disadvantage the poor and vice versa. Nor if the truth is truth can it be decided by majority vote: for the truth as truth will be compelling no matter how many or how few people vote for it. The truth is, and can only be determined by the Truth, that is, by God who has created man and the universe. What falls to man to do is to discover that truth and abide by it.³²

Islam is a monotheistic religion that holds as its fundamental principle the oneness of God. The One True God is a reflection of the unique concept that Islam associates with God. To a Muslim, *Allah* is the Almighty, Creator and Sustainer of the universe; who is similar to nothing and nothing is comparable to Him. The Prophet Mohammad was asked by his contemporaries about *Allah*; the answer came directly from God Himself in the form of a short

31. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and realities of Islam*, (London: Herper Collins Publishers, 1988), p. 16

32. M. Fethullah Gulen, *Prophet Muhammad as Commander*, (Turkey: Kaynak (Izmir) A.S., 1998), p. 15. Fethullah Gulen was one of the most prominent Islamic scholar in Turkey. He preached about the importance of mutual understanding and tolerance among world religions.

chapter of the *Qur'an*, which is considered the essence of unity or the motto of monotheism. As is written in the Holy *Qur'an*, "In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Say (O Mohammad) He is God the One God, the Everlasting Refuge, who has not begotten, nor has been begotten, and equal to Him is not anyone" (*Qur'an* : 112).

According to the *Qur'an* the Ultimate Reality is *Allah*. He is Absolute Reality, Self-subsisting and Eternal. He is the first and the last, the Seen and the Unseen. *Allah* is the Truth. He is all knowing. He is Transcendent and at the same time immanent. The exact nature of *Allah* cannot be known. Yet the *Qur'an* uses the process of similitude and metaphor, which comes from human experience in order that we can have some knowledge of *Allah*. The *Qur'an* describes the attributes of *Allah* through similitude. These attributes of *Allah* are infinite. If the Creator is Eternal and Everlasting, then His attributes must also be eternal and everlasting. He should not lose any of His attributes nor acquire new ones. If this is so, then His attributes are absolute. The *Qur'an* mentions the following attributes of *Allah*.

He is God; there is no god but He. He is the Knower of the unseen and the visible; He is the All-merciful, the All-Compassionate. He is God; there is no god but He. He is the King, the All-holy, the All-peace, the Guardian of Faith, the All-preserver, the All-mighty, the All-compeller, the All-sublime. Glory be to God, above that they associate! He is God the Creator, the Maker, the Shaper. To Him belong the Most Beautiful Names. All that is in the heavens and the earth magnifies Him; He is the All-mighty, the All-wise (*Qur'an* 59:22-24).

According to the *Qur'an*, *Allah* is the creator of everything. He created the world with a purpose; however, this purpose may be hidden from human beings. *Allah* is not only the creator, but also the sustainer and the Protector of all His creations.

Lo! Your Lord is *Allah* who created the heavens and the earth in six days, then He established Himself upon the throne directing all things. There is no intercessor (with Him) save after His permission. That is *Allah*, your Lord, so worship Him. Oh will ye not remind (*Qur'an* 10: 4).

Man was created with the divine spirit breathed into him, according to the *Qur'an*. *Allah* created him in the most beautiful form, and he is the highest of all creations. The human soul is of divine origin, for *Allah* has breathed a bit of His own spirit into man. Therefore the main aim of man is a progressive achievement of these very divine attributes.³³

According to the *Qur'an*, *Allah* is also the supreme intelligence who governs the whole universe. He alone is the source of all power. The name *al-'alim*, he who knows, is one of the divine names; Intelligence, Will and Speech are essentially three Divine qualities. It is *Allah* who possesses these three qualities, but God has entrusted them to man so that, through them, man might be led back to God Himself. Thus, the real nature of intelligence is ultimately to come to realize that *La ilaha il Allah*, (there is no god but *Allah*), to know that, at the end, there is only one Absolute Reality.³⁴ In other words, intelligence is the realization of the absolute nature of *Allah*, and the acknowledgement of the relativity of everything other than Him. He is the only Truth and everything else exists as relative truth.

According to the Islamic faith, God has sent prophets from time to time to renew this message, but Muhammad alone has received all of the messages meant for all people for all time. His, Mohammed's, coming to the world is the seal of the Prophets. Prophets are mere humans, not divine, as there is only one Divinity. Prophets also recognize all scriptures and traditions, but the *Qur'an* alone is considered fully authentic because it is untranslated, unchanged and came directly from God. The *Qur'an* is the Truth of God.³⁵

2. Islamic View of Non-violence

The word Islam comes from the Arabic word '*silm*', which means peace. This is why Islam is called a religion of Peace. Moreover, a Muslim normally greets others saying "*Assalam-u-alaykum*", which means, on you be peace. Peace is the fruit of nonviolent actions. In the *Qur'an*, as well as in the teaching of Muhammad, there are many references to non-violence.

33. Saiyed Abdul Hai, *Muslim Philosophy*, pp. 28-29.

34. Seyyed Hossein, *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, p. 19.

35. Mary Pat Fisher, *Religions Today*, (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 232.

As a religion, Islam teaches non-violence. In the *Qur'an*, the word '*Fasad*' is used for violence. *Fasad* means those violent actions which disrupt the social system and bring losses in terms of lives and property. *Allah* does not love *fasad* or violence (Surah 2:205). Rather He loves '*Sabr*,' or non-violence. In the *Qur'an*, Peace is one of the names of God (Surah, 59:23). Those who seek to please *Allah* will be guided by Him to the "way of peace" (Surah 16:5). Patience is another important virtue in the *Qur'an*, which is set above all other Islamic virtues. Being patient brings with it the promise of exceptional reward (Surah 39:10). Patience implies a nonviolent response or reaction, whereas impatience implies a violent response. According to Islamic tradition God grants '*Rifq*' (gentleness) to the nonviolent, which he does not grant to the violent (Sunan, Abu Dawood, 4: 255). This teaching of the Hadith clearly indicates that non-violence is the superior method.

Islam teaches one to be kind and compassionate to others because God is kind and compassionate to men and women. It invites its followers to live as brothers and sisters, to build up good relationships with everyone and to create a harmonious atmosphere in society. Since the whole of mankind is the family of God, the *Qur'an* teaches us not to disrupt relations with our fellow men and women, not to live apart from one another, and not to entertain spite or envy. All men and women are to live like brothers and sisters.³⁶

Islam has a great reverence for life. As mankind is one single family, every member is related to each other. If one person fails to show mercy and justice to an individual, other persons will also be incapable of showing mercy and justice to the rest of the mankind. That is why killing without proper justification is evil.

If anyone kills a person, except by way of retribution for murder or to stop rioting on earth, he is as guilty as if he had killed the whole human race. And, he who saves the life of a single person is as one who has saved the whole human race. Our prophets have come to them in succession with clear arguments (against fighting and murder) and yet there were many amongst them who committed excesses on earth (Sura 5:33).

36. Dr. K.G Saiyidain, *Islam, The Religion of Peace*, (New Delhi: Islam and the modern age society, 1976) p. 160.

Islam as a true and eternal religion is revealed by God, who is the Lord of the world, All Just and All Compassionate, and who cannot approve of any injustice. The Islamic method is totally based on the principle of non-violence. It is not lawful for believers to initiate hostilities. But because the *Qur'an* was revealed within the context of an all-out war, there are several passages, which deal with the proper conduct of armed struggle. Except in cases where self-defense is inevitable, the *Qur'an*, in no circumstances, approves violence. As God decrees in the *Qur'an*, "Fight in the way of God against those who fight against you, but do not transgress. God does not love transgressors". (Al-Baqara 2: 190) However, the *Qur'an* teaches that where fighting is necessary, the believer should not avoid fighting and should fight well. The believers should not flee from the battlefield. Fleeing from the battlefield is one of the seven major sins. One who commits this grave sin causes disorder in the Muslim ranks and demoralizes the others. The *Qur'an* decrees:

O you who believe! When you meet in battle those who do not believe turn not your back to them. Whoever on that day turns his back to them, unless manouevring for the battle or intent to join a company, he has truly incurred wrath from God, and his habitation will be Hell- an evil homecoming! (Sura al-Anfal, 8:15-16)

One of the most controversial and misunderstood Islamic concepts is *Jihad*, translated in English as "Holy War". From western accounts, one may easily get the idea that *Jihad* is a war against non-Muslims to propagate Islamic faith. In fact, Islam prefers non-violence to war and *Jihad* is not one of its Pillars, or essential practices.

The word *Jihad* comes from the word '*Jahd*' which means ability or exertion of power. So *Jihad* means to struggle, to exert one's power to the utmost in repelling the enemy.³⁷ *Jihad* has two aspects: greater *Jihad* and lesser *Jihad*. Struggle against one's own superstitions, wrong convictions and carnal desire is called greater *Jihad*. This enlightens the person both intellectually and spiritually. The lesser *Jihad* is understood as fighting for God's cause. This includes every action from prostelyzation to presenting oneself on the battlefield,- provided such action is done for God's sake. These two forms of *Jihad* cannot be separated from one another. Those

37. Saiyed Abdul Hai, *Muslim Philosophy*, p. 273

who are able to overcome carnal desire can perform lesser *Jihad*, which, in turn, helps the person to succeed in the greater *Jihad*.³⁸

All faithful Muslims are thus involved in a continuous 'greater *Jihad*,' which is largely non-violent.

'The lesser *Jihad*', war, is commanded by *Allah*, but must be carried out according to strict rules. After the Prophet Muhammad, His son-in-law, the first of the Imams, Caliph Ali gave the following rules for the guidance of his army. This also reflects respect for life.

- a. Never begin a war yourself. God does not like bloodshed.
- b. Never be first to attack your enemy. Only repulse his attacks but do so bravely.
- c. When reciting the Rajaz (a declaration before actual fighting) do not waste your time and, instead of speaking about yourself and your deeds, speak about God and the holy Prophet.
- d. Never follow and kill those who run away from the battle or an encounter. Life is dear to them; let them live as long as death permits them to do so.
- e. Never kill wounded persons who cannot defend themselves.
- f. Never strip naked a dead man for his coat of arms or dress.
- g. Never cut the nose and ears of the dead to humiliate them.
- h. Never take to loot and arson.
- i. Never molest or outrage the modesty of women.
- j. Never hurt a woman even if she swears at you or hurts you.
- k. Never hurt a child.
- l. Never hurt an old or an enfeebled person.³⁹

In modern times, when Muslims are engaged in bloody wars, terrorist activities, suicide bombings, hijackings and massacres of innocent civilians, many might conclude that Islam is a religion of violence. But it would be a grave mistake to consider Osama Bin Laden and other terrorist activists as authentic representatives of Islam. The ultimate goal and meaning of Islam and its *Jihad*, is peace through loving surrender to God. Being enlightened by the true spirit of Islam, Sufi Shayk M.R. Bawa Muhaiyaddeen says,

If one knows the true meaning of Islam, there will be no wars. All that will be heard are the sounds of prayer and the greetings of

38. Gulen M. Fethullah, *Prophet Muhammad As Commander*, (Turkey: Kaynak, 1998), p.23-24.

39. Dr. K.G Saiyidain, *Islam, The Religion of Peace*, p.174.

peace. Only the resonance of God will be heard. That is the ocean of Islam. That is unity. That is our wealth and our true weapon.⁴⁰

Islam is a religion of peace. It believes in *Allah* as the Ultimate Truth, who is compassionate and merciful. The true spirit of Islam is belief in the Oneness of God, Brotherhood of mankind and respect for human life. So, Islam cannot be considered as *the*, or even a, 'religion of violence'.

F. Gandhi's View of *Satyagraha* and *Ahimsa*

Truth, *Satyagraha* and *Ahimsa* are the three most basic concepts in the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi and they were fully expressed in Gandhi's life in his thoughts, words and deeds. They are closely related to each other. The interconnection of these three concepts in Gandhi's philosophy is such that it is difficult to explain them separately. To analyze one it is necessary to involve the others. According to Gandhi, Truth as God is the End of all human beings. *Ahimsa* is the only means to attain the End and *Satyagraha* is *Ahimsa* in action. *Satyagraha* is directly related to Truth and Non-violence.

1. Gandhi's View of *Satyagraha*

The Sanskrit Word "*Satyagraha*" is composed of two words: *Satya* and *Agraha*. *Satya* means truth and *Agraha* means holding on or persistence. So, '*Satyagraha*' means grasping truth or persistence in truth. Gandhi calls it 'Soul-force' or 'Truth-force'. In order to grasp the full meaning of *Satyagraha*, it is important to know the meaning of Truth in Gandhi's view.

The word '*Satya*', meaning truth, is derived from 'Sat', which means existence. Everything that exists is contained in Truth. Knowledge comes from Truth and knowledge leads to bliss. Therefore, knowledge and bliss are both contained in Truth. In Indian tradition God is considered as "Sat-Chit-Ananda", which means God is Truth, Consciousness and Bliss. It is out of this tradition, as well as out of his experience and rational judgment, that Gandhi came to conclude that Truth is God.

Gandhi came to equate Truth with God. He did not deny other attributes of God, such as Love, Compassion, and Justice. But he did

40. Sufi Shayk M.R. *Bawa Muhaiyaddeen*, cited in *Religions Today*, p, 245.

Shayk M.R. Bawa is a Islamic mystic from Sri Lanka.

perceive that if he said God is Truth, then truth became only an attribute of God. For Gandhi, Truth was not one of the many attributes or qualities of God. Rather, Truth is the living embodiment of God. Gandhi's conclusion that Truth is God was not only a result of his metaphysical speculation, but the result of his fifty years of searching for Truth. Gandhi put it this way,

I would say with those who say God is Love, God is Love. But deep down in me I used to say that though God may be Love, God is also Truth, above all. If it is possible for the human tongue to give the fullest description of God, I have come to the conclusion that, for myself, God is Truth. But two years ago I went a step further and said that Truth is God. You will see the fine distinction between the two statements, viz., that God is Truth and Truth is God. And I came to the conclusion after a continuous and relentless search after Truth which began nearly fifty years ago.⁴¹

Truth as God is the fundamental concept in the thought of Gandhi. It was his justification for the sub-title of his autobiography as "The Story of My Experiments with the Truth". In his autobiography Gandhi revealed that his whole life was dedicated to the search for truth. He was ready to sacrifice everything for Absolute Truth. He worshiped God as Truth. Truth as God is the Absolute Reality of Hindu belief, *Nirvana* of Buddhist belief, God of Christian belief, and the same Truth as *Allah* of Muslim belief. He held that humans cannot know the Absolute Truth. This is only for God alone to know. God is the Absolute Truth and all others are relative truths. What human beings can know is relative truth. Man can follow the truth only as he sees it and such pursuit of truth cannot lead anyone astray Gandhi was a humble seeker of Truth, worshipping God as Truth. As Gandhi wrote,

But I worship God as Truth only. I have not yet found Him, but I am seeking after Him. I am prepared to sacrifice the things dearest to me in pursuit of this quest. Even if the sacrifice demanded be my life, I hope I may be prepared to give it. But as long as I have not realized this Absolute Truth, so long must I hold by the relative

41. U.R. Rao, & R. K. Prabhu (ed), *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1946), p. 51.

truth as I have conceived it. That relative truth must, meanwhile, be my beacon, my shield and buckler.⁴²

Gandhi is the original author of the '*Satyagraha*' concept; which is non-violence in action. Gandhi also called it Soul-force or Truth-force. *Satyagraha* is directly related to truth and *Ahimsa*. It is the way in which *Ahimsa* is implemented or it is the technique of non-violence in the search of truth. Gandhi's religious and metaphysical beliefs concerning Truth or God, Soul or *Atma*, and the essential unity of all existence were existentially expressed in the concept of *Satyagraha*.

Gandhi described *Satyagraha* in a variety of ways. One way it has been described is as the weapon of the strong and not of the weak. It is impossible for those who are weak to apply Soul-force, for it makes great demands on those who would use it. It excludes the use of violence in all forms whether in thought, word or action. Gandhi reiterated:

The fight of *Satyagraha* is for the strong in spirit, not the doubter or the timid. *Satyagraha* teaches us the art of living as well as dying. Birth and death are inevitable among mortals. What distinguishes the man from the brute is his conscious striving to realize the spirit within.⁴³

Satyagraha is the purest and surest remedy for all evils. It can never be defeated by evil. The purpose of *Satyagraha* is not to defeat or embarrass the evildoer; rather, it aims at winning man over by the power of gentle love and self-suffering. It offers love for all, for all times. It distinguishes between system and people. A system may be evil, but people always deserve respect and are never beyond redemption. A *Satyagrahi* may hate an evil system but never its people. A follower of *Satyagraha* can violate man-made or state-made laws, when they come in conflict with the law of God. A *Satyagrahi* makes use of nonviolent methods of non-cooperation, civil disobedience, fasting, picketing and *hartal* as forms of protest, but always uses righteous means for the removal of evil.

As *Satyagraha* is the most active force, it can be used by individuals, as well as, by communities. It can also be used in both

42. *Ibid.* p. 43

43. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p.168

political and domestic affairs. Men, women and children can use it alike. According to Gandhi, one who wants to apply the principles of *Satyagraha* should have the following qualifications:

- a. He must have a living faith in God, for He is his only Rock.
- b. He must believe in truth and non-violence as his creed and, therefore, have faith in the inherent goodness of human nature which he expects to evoke by his truth and love expressed through his suffering.
- c. He must lead a chaste life and be ready and willing, for the sake of his cause, to give up his life and his possessions.
- d. He must be a habitual Khadi-wearer and spinner. This is essential for India.
- e. He must be a teetotaler and be free from the use of other intoxicants in order that his reason may be always unclouded and his mind constant.
- f. He must carry out with a willing heart all the rules or discipline as may be laid down from time to time.
- g. He should carry out the jail rules unless they are specially devised to hurt his self-respect.

The qualifications are not to be regarded as exhaustive. They are illustrative of the importance of self denial and self reflection as a means to searching for Truth.⁴⁴

For Gandhi, *Satyagraha* is the only means to establish peace in the world. War and violence may bring temporary good but the evils they engender remain permanent in the world. War creates more violence, hatred and anger. Gandhi recognized that soldiers who sacrificed their lives in war had enough heroism, but he also recognized that sacrifice and heroism in a bad cause are a waste of splendid energy. A *Satyagrahi* is a hero who sacrifices his life for the righteous cause. He never hates but loves his violent enemy. He is ready to sacrifice his life on the altar of Truth. He motivates the masses by his conviction and sacrifice. Death of a single *Satyagrahi* is enough to bring about change in the world. Gandhi wrote:

I am not ashamed to stand erect before the heroic self-sacrificing revolutionary because I am able to put an equal measure of non-

44. *Harijan*, 25-3-1939, p. 64.

violent man's heroism and sacrifice untarnished by the blood of the innocent. The Self-sacrifice of one innocent man is a million times more potent than the sacrifice of a million men who die in the act of killing others.⁴⁵

I. Gandhi's View of Ahimsa

The concept of *Ahimsa* is not original to Mahatma Gandhi. *Ahimsa* is taught by dozens of scriptures and persons within Indian's religious traditions. The Upanishad, Mahavira, Buddha and Manu used the word *Ahimsa* as a moral and ethical principle. But in our time, when we talk about *Ahimsa*, immediately Gandhi's name comes to mind. Gandhi not only advocated *Ahimsa*, he widely applied this principle in his personal, social and political sphere.

Gandhi confessed that his life's dedication to the spread of the doctrine of *Ahimsa* could not be attributed to one single person or a single scripture. Rather, his inspiration came from many different scriptures, founders and persons of different religious traditions. Gandhi himself testified to this,

There are more instances than one in my public life when, with the ability to retaliate, I have refrained from doing so and advised friends to do likewise. My life is dedicated to the spread of that doctrine. I read it in the teaching of all the great teachers of the world - Zoroaster, Mahavir, Daniel, Jesus, Nanak, and a host of others.⁴⁶

According to Manu, the framer of Hindu law, the killing of animals for sacrifice and food is allowable. He taught that *Ahimsa* cannot be practiced by ordinary men, and his teaching on the killing of animals for sacrifice and food, therefore, is a concession for ordinary human beings. On the other hand, Jainism teaches that killing and injuring in all circumstances is evil and sinful. Gandhi followed a middle path. He rejected the Hindu liberality that killing is permitted for eating and for religious sacrifices. In this respect, he is closer to Jainism than to Hinduism. However, he did differ from Jainism in that he believed that killing was not an evil in all circumstances. For Gandhi, there are times when killing or injuring others becomes a duty. According to Gandhi, there are three different types of killing on the part of humans

45. Mahatma Gandhi, *Young India*, Feb. 12 1925, p.60

46. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p.23

that may be justified. Firstly, one is justified when one is sustaining the body. Man cannot sustain the body without killing some form of life for food. Secondly, one is justified in killing when one is protecting those under one's care. Gandhi illustrates,

He who refrains from killing a murderer, who is about to kill his ward (when he cannot prevent him otherwise) earns no merit, but commits a sin: he practices no *ahimsa* but *himsa* out of a fatuous sense of *ahimsa*.⁴⁷

The third justification is violence as a means to ease the suffering of another out of love. Gandhi gives this example, "just as a surgeon does not commit *Himsa* but practices the purest *Ahimsa* when he wields his knife on his patient's body for the latter's benefit..."⁴⁸ According to Gandhi, to cause pain, to wish ill, and to take a life out of anger or a selfish motive are all *Himsa*. On the other hand, it may be the purest form of *Ahimsa*, after a prudent and clear judgment, to will or cause pain to a living being, with a view to their spiritual or physical benefit from a pure selfless intention.⁴⁹

According to Gandhi *Ahimsa* is not merely non-killing or non-injury as it is often translated in English. Gandhi gave a much wider and deeper meaning to it. It is non-killing, non-injuring or non-hurting in thought, word and action. *Ahimsa* is manifested in compassionate love, social service, social justice, respect for life, renunciation and fearlessness. Gandhi explained,

Ahimsa is not the crude thing it has been made to appear. Not to hurt any living thing is no doubt a part of *Ahimsa*. But it is its least expression. The principle of *Ahimsa* is violated by every evil thought, by undue haste, by lying, by hatred, by wishing ill to anybody. It is also violated by our holding on to what the world needs.⁵⁰

According to Gandhi non-violence implies several positive values, such as:

a. Love

While *Ahimsa* or non-violence can be heard as a negative expression, *ahimsa* is the positive practice of the law of love. As Gandhi said,

47. *Young India*, Nov. 4, 1926

48. *Ibid.* Oct. 4, 1926

49. *Ibid.* Oct. 4, 1928

50. Mahatma Gandhi, *Yeravada Mandir*, first edition, 1945, p.7

“In its positive form, *Ahimsa* means the largest love, greatest charity.”⁵¹ Love is the very basis of *Ahimsa*. Every nonviolent act has to be performed with love and every violent act has to be considered as an act of ill will and hatred.

b. Tolerance

Love creates tolerance, and it is also a positive character of *Ahimsa*. Tolerance or love of the wrongdoer does not mean to support the wrong-doer’s activities. Rather, violence that brings injustice has to be resisted. Gandhi posed that, “No man could be actively nonviolent and not rise against social injustice no matter where it occurred.”⁵² Resistance, however, has to be with love, tolerance and the intention to convert the wrongdoer.

c. Fearlessness

Fearlessness is also an essential attribute of non-violence. According to Gandhi, non-violence presupposes the ability to strike. Cowardice is the very antithesis of *ahimsa* and even worse than violence. As Gandhi said, “My creed of non-violence is an extremely active force. It has no room for cowardice or even weakness.”⁵³

d. Truthfulness

Truthfulness is an inseparable attribute of *Ahimsa*. A nonviolent person should be truthful in thought, word and action. According to Gandhi, truth has to be told in gentle language. The intention behind every action is important. Nonviolent action implies truthfulness as its source. Truthfulness also includes sincerity and faithfulness.

e. Non-possession

According to Gandhi, To possess more than one needs is incompatible with love and non-violence. Here Gandhi reminds Hindus that, according to tradition, every good Hindu, after living the householder’s life for a certain period of time, is expected to live a life of non-possession of property,. Moreover, Gandhi teaches that when we possess more than we need we are, in fact, stealing it from others. This is why a follower of the law of love cannot hold anything against tomorrow. As Gandhi wrote,

51. Krishna Kripalani, (ed), *All Men are Brothers*, (New York: World without War Publications, Unesco, 1972), p. 84.

52. *Harijan* April 20, 1940

53. *Ibid.* July 15, 1939

Civilization, in the real sense of the term, consists not in the multiplication, but in the deliberate and voluntary reduction of wants. This alone promotes real happiness and contentment, and increases the capacity for service.⁵⁴

For Gandhi, renunciation and non-possession truly make people happy.

f. Brahmacharya

Literally the term *Brahmacharya* means the path of God- realization, which includes the control of all the senses in thought, word, and action at all times and in all places. One who practices *Ahimsa* has to be spiritually and mentally disciplined. *Brahmacharya* helps the person to be spiritually and mentally disciplined by controlling all senses and desires. It purifies the heart and mind of those who practice *Ahimsa*. Stressing its importance, Gandhi wrote,

The full and proper meaning of Brahmacharya is the search of Brahman. Brahman pervades every being and can therefore be searched by diving into and realizing the inner self. This realization is impossible without control of the senses.⁵⁵

Ahimsa can never be solely a policy or guideline. It is an eternal virtue; it is a way of life. It is the only means to attain the Ultimate End, which is God as Truth. It is the basic quality of seekers after Truth. Without *Ahimsa* no Self-realization is possible. It is the highest *Dharma* in the law of nature. It is only through the practice of *ahimsa* that one can reach, recognize and realize the Ultimate Truth, *Nirvana*, Universal Soul or *Brahman*. Those who make it only a policy will fail in their End-quest. They might also be tempted to become involved in violent acts. On the other hand, those who strictly adhere to the vow of *Ahimsa* as a sacred creed of life or as a fundamental way of life can never be duped into violence.

One does not use *Ahimsa* simply to resolve conflicts. One does not 'use' *Ahimsa* on a part-time basis. As an eternal virtue, *Ahimsa* is to be lived continually in thought, word and deed, not just in times of conflict. *Ahimsa* destroys the root cause of war and conflict. Conflict, war, and terrorism grow because of hatred and *Himsa*, but

54. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p.189

55. *Ibid.* p. 273

before *Ahimsa* all hatred and *Himsa* melt. If everyone accepted *Ahimsa* as a moral and ethical principle of life and lived it with constancy and integrity, there would be no question of conflict, war or terrorism.

Gandhi recognized that absolute *Ahimsa* is impossible as long as men are flesh and blood. The concept of *Ahimsa* is not easy to understand and is even more difficult to practice, because we are weak. As the first condition of nonviolent living one has to have strong faith in God and practice justice in all aspects of one's life.⁵⁶

Looking at the present realities of the world where truths are many, and violence and killing are daily events, one might question if Gandhi's philosophy of *Satyagraha* and *Ahimsa* is still relevant. Some might even argue whether or not Gandhi was successful in advocating truth and non-violence. The success of Gandhi's advocacy in itself is irrelevant. Gandhi never claimed success. He was, however, a sincere seeker of the truth. Herein lies the greatness of Gandhi. Gandhi is still remembered for his sincerity and faithfulness in searching for the truth, following the way of *Satyagraha* and *Ahimsa*. Ten years before Gandhi's death R. Tagore rightly wrote about him,

Perhaps he will not succeed, perhaps he will fail as Buddha failed and as Christ failed to wean men from their iniquities, but he will always be remembered as one who made his life a lesson for all ages to come.⁵⁷

56. *All Men are Bothers*, p. 77

57. Rabindranath Tagore, *The Statesman*, *Calcutta Daily*, (Feb. 20, 1938). Tagore was one of most important philosophers of modern India. He was mainly influenced by the Upanishads, Brahmosamaj, Vaisnavism and Christianity. He was in the line of ancient religio-philosophical seers whose work is a synthesis of both religion and philosophy and his philosophy was based on intuitions.

CHAPTER TWO

UNDERSTANDING OF INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

A. Meaning of Dialogue

The English word 'dialogue' comes from the Greek "dia" which means "through" and "logos" which means "the word", "through meaning." It gives the image of a river of meaning flowing around and through the participants out of which may emerge some new understanding; something creative. Dialogue moves beyond any single individual's understanding, to make explicit the implicit and build collective meaning and community.

According to George Olivera, from the psychological point of view, dialogue is a reaction word, because it presupposes a state of isolation and individualism from which one has to come out. From a historical point of view, dialogue is also a reaction word; it's a reaction to monologue.¹

People have explained dialogue in many different ways. According to W. Taylor, there are four different types of dialogue: Socratic dialogue, Buberian dialogue, Discursive dialogue and Pedagogic dialogue.²

1. Socratic Dialogue

Socratic Dialogue is practiced in small groups with the help of a facilitator, so that self-confidence in one's own thinking is enhanced and the search for truth in answer to a particular question is

1. George Olivera, *On toleration: From Theory to Social Praxis*, (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1998), p. 51.

George Olivera was awarded doctorate in Philosophy from Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome. He has been teaching philosophy in *Deena Seva Ashrm*- an Institute of Philosophy and Religion, Bangalore, India.

2. *Ibid.* 51

undertaken in common. The Socratic method encourages participants to reflect and think independently and critically. No prior philosophical training is needed, provided participants are motivated to utilize the method, are willing to contribute their thoughts honestly and listen to the thoughts of others. The questions, drawn mainly from ethics, politics, epistemology, mathematics and psychology, are of a general and fundamental nature. The group endeavor is to reach consensus, not as an aim in itself, but as a means to deepen the investigation.

2. Buberian Dialogue

This type of dialogue is based on the “I-Thou” relationship. The important aspects of this kind of dialogue are mutuality, directedness, presentness, intensity and ineffability. Here one person affirms the other as a person. Every partner must be open, faithful and willing to share his thoughts. Through this, he makes the contribution of his spirit without reduction and this brings the experience of human authenticity.

3. Discursive Dialogue

This kind of dialogue is characterized by reasoning; passing from premises to consequences. It involves abstraction and analysis through the use of common sets of categories or symbols. In this form of dialogue, men can understand each other’s theoretical position.

b. Pedagogic Dialogue

This form of dialogue is one of interaction; meanings and experiences are exchanged which, taken together, may constitute new meanings. This is pre-constructed dialogue used to educate and train students and disciples. Men are not born with truth, nor does truth exist in the individual mind. Truth is created between people through a dialogic process.

B. Meaning of Inter-Religious Dialogue

The term “inter-religious” carries many different levels of meaning, and each level is relevant and valid within the context in which it is found.

The term “interfaith” is often used, which recognizes the personal commitment of the practitioner in dialogue. The term “interfaith” is also used when referring to activities that involve interaction between different faiths such as dialoguing, praying,

marrying or working on joint community projects. At times the term “multi-faith” is used, but it has no special connection to dialogue; it only means many faiths. Multi-faith is used more generally to describe a situation where many faiths are present in one setting, as with a multi-faith community resource guide. While the two terms are often used interchangeably, interfaith emphasizes more the interaction between faiths, whereas multi-faith emphasizes the simultaneous presence of more than one faith.

The term inter-religious dialogue is similar in meaning to interfaith dialogue; however it generally focuses more on the philosophical, sociological, cultural and political aspects of the dialogic process.

Traditionally, inter-religious dialogue has been explained as a path to understanding other religions through dialogue and cooperative ventures. In this explanation, the major task of inter-religious dialogue is to build bridges of understanding between religions, and to foster community and cooperation on a local, national and/or international level. Inter-religious ministers and inter-religious clergy help facilitate dialogue through an understanding of and compassion for all faiths.

Inter-religious dialogue is not a discussion. Rather, it is best understood as a process of sharing between the people of different religions on particular or general issues, in order to foster the common good within society. In dialogue the goal is not to try to convince others of our points of view. There is no emphasis on “winning,” but rather the aim is towards learning, collaboration and the ultimate synthesis of the expressed points of view. In this manner, “dialogue is not mutual imitation; it is mutual good example, mutual witnessing of life, it is readiness for mutual understanding, it is mutual appreciation of each other’s religiosity without making any comparison.”³ Inter-religious dialogue helps us to appreciate each other’s religion, for there are seeds of human liberation within all religions.

According to the Theological Advisory Commission of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conference, inter-religious dialogue is

3 Bp. Oswald Gomes, quoted by Fr. Luigi Pinos Pime, *Mission and Joy*, (Rajshahi: 1998), p. 139.

not primarily a relationship between two religions as social institutions or a comparison of two creeds or theologies. Rather, it is a relationship between believers who are committed and rooted in their own faith, but who, at the same time, are open to other believers. The Commission defines inter-religious dialogue in the following statement,

Inter-religious dialogue is a communication and sharing of life, experience, vision and reflection by believers of different religions searching together to discover the work of the Spirit among them. Removing prejudices, it grows towards mutual understanding and enrichment, towards a discerning and common witness and towards commitment to promote and defend human and spiritual values leading to deeper levels of spiritual experience. It is a journeying together in a communion of minds and hearts towards the Kingdom to which God calls all peoples.⁴

Inter-religious dialogue cannot exist on an abstract level. It is a philosophy and at the same time, it is a way of life. In a multi religious culture, it touches all areas of human life. The aim of inter-religious dialogue is not to build relationships only among intellectuals and/or experts. Rather, in the spirit of having a common goal and origin, it aims to bring into relationships believers who are committed and rooted in their own faiths and who are, at the same time, open and respectful of believers of other faiths. For this reason dialogue is able to take place on different levels of human life.

C. Forms of Inter-Religious Dialogue

All religions promote ethical values and consist of spiritual experiences. All religions are based on philosophical principles through which religious concepts are explained. Therefore, inter-religious dialogue can be approached on different levels: the ethical, the intellectual and the spiritual. According to Professor Diana Eck, who is the moderator of The World Council of Churches' Sub-Unit for Dialogue, there can be six forms of inter-religious dialogue.⁵

4. Edmundo Chia, FSC, *Dialogue: Resource Manual for Catholics in Asia*, (Pattaya: FABE-OEIA, 2001), p.91.

5. Marcus Braybrooke, *Pilgrimage of Hope, One hundred years of Global Interfaith Dialogue*, (New York: Crossroad, 1992), p. 310

1. Parliamentary Dialogue

This style of dialogue can be employed in large assemblies created for interfaith discussion, such as that organized for the 1893 World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago. This type of international gathering tends to explore broad concerns or global issues, such as the possibilities for better cooperation between religions on peace, poverty, and the environment. This form of dialogue also serves as an important symbol of the strength and vitality of the inter-religious movement.

2. Institutional Dialogue

This form of dialogue refers to particular religious institutions that aim to initiate and facilitate various kinds of dialogue. This type of dialogue also seeks to establish and nurture channels of communication between the institutional bases of religious communities. The active role of the Vatican and The World Council of Churches are the best examples of this form.

3. Theological Dialogue

This form of dialogue takes place among the representatives of different religious communities to discuss theological and philosophical issues in a structured format. For example, these representatives' discussions might concentrate on their scriptures, moral values or the role of religion in society.

4. Dialogue in Community

This form of dialogue is also called the "dialogue of life." It encompasses the unstructured interaction between people of different religions in their ordinary lives. This inter-religious dialogue may take place in markets and on street corners, during festivals or holy days, at times of community or family crisis.

5. Spiritual Dialogue

This form of dialogue is not concerned with theological problems between religious communities. It stresses shared experience as a means of developing spirituality. People who engage in this form of dialogue attempt to learn from each other's tradition of prayers, meditations and worship. Participating in joint worship experiences and the common celebration of religious festivals, the participants' spiritual life is deepened.

6. Inner Dialogue

This form of dialogue takes place within each individual as their religious perspectives change through their encounter with other faiths. This is the form of dialogue that moves our hearts and minds when we read the scriptures of other religions, when we meet individual religious figures, when we hear another religion's call to prayer, or when we share a meal with people of another faith during one of their feast days or holy days.

On the deepest level, inter-religious dialogue is the search for truth. It recognizes that all religions have an inner, contemplative structure out of which the outer forms of tradition, ritual, scripture and belief have evolved. Participants in inner dialogue do not desire easy compromise as they search for truth. They realize that dialogue does not necessarily produce agreement.

D. The Aims of Inter-Religious Dialogue

It is important to know the aims and objectives of inter-religious dialogue, so that both sides involved in the dialogue may strive to attain the same goals. Leonard Swidler, a Catholic professor of inter-religious dialogue, succinctly summarizes three goals of dialogue:⁶

1. To Know Oneself More Profoundly: to know one's own religious faith just as one learns more about one's native land as a result of living abroad.
2. To Know the Other ever More Authentically: to know the faith of other religions in order to be respectful and tolerant of the other.
3. To Live ever More Fully: a process described as "mutual transformation".

In the process of dialogue, self-knowledge and the knowledge of others grow and mutual transformation takes place.

John Cobb, a liberal Protestant Scholar of Inter-religious dialogue, reflects the academic consensus when he states, a "sharp

6. Leonard Swidler, (ed), *Towards a Universal Theology of Religion*, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987) pp 26-27.

distinction is made between dialogue and evangelistic witness.”⁷ While the latter aims at conversion, the former does not. The goal of dialogue is mutual understanding, appreciation and transformation.

Within the context of inter-religious dialogue, Leonard Swidler proposed what he terms a Decalogue of dialogue.

First commandment : The primary purpose of dialogue is to change and grow in the perception and understanding of reality and then to act accordingly.

Second commandment : Inter-religious dialogue must be a two-sided project-within each religious community and between religious communities.

Third commandment : Each participant must come to the dialogue with complete honesty and sincerity.

Fourth commandment: Each participant must assume a similar complete honesty and sincerity, in other partners.

Fifth commandment : Each participant must define himself. Only the Jew, for example, can define what it means to be a Jew. The rest can only describe what it looks like from the outside.

Sixth commandment : Each participant must come to the dialogue with no hard-and-fast assumptions as to where the points of disagreement are.

Seventh commandment : Dialogue can take place only between equals.

Eight commandment : Dialogue can take place only between equals. (this is repeated to stress its importance)

Ninth commandment : People entering into inter-religious dialogue must be at least minimally self-critical of both themselves and their own religious traditions.

Tenth commandment : Each participant eventually must attempt to experience the partner’s religion from within.⁸

7 John Cobb, *A Dialogue on Dialogue in Death or Dialogue*, cited in “From the age of Monologue to the Age of Dialogue”, edited by L. Swidler, (London: SCM Press, 1990) p. 8.

8. Leonard Swidler, Cited in *On Tolerance: From Theory to Social Praxis*, p. 54

E. Inter-Religious Dialogue In Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam

1. Meaning of Inter-Religious Dialogue in Hinduism

Hinduism is the oldest and third largest religion in the world. It does not prescribe a set of dogmas to believe, in order to receive *Muksa* or liberation. Rather, it has embraced various religious beliefs and practices over its three thousand year history. The word "Hindu" comes from its geographical location around the Indus River. Many of the religious beliefs, practices, and traditions developed over the last three thousand years in dialogue conducted practices evolving among the people living around the Indus River--people who have been grouped together and named "Hindus." This is why Hinduism has no founder, no one creed, system of belief or a single Scripture to which all Hindus can find their origin.

From the very beginning Hinduism has been pluralistic. Sociologically, it maintained a pluralistic caste system, including different *dharma* for each social group as well as separate *dharma* for each individual (*svadharmas*). Intellectually, it advocates many gods or polytheism, but, as Wendy Doniger explains, its polytheism carries a peculiarly monistic hue. F. Max Müller has termed this phenomena "henotheism", which means worship of one (supreme) god at a time.⁹

As a religion and philosophy, Hinduism comprises varieties of beliefs, customs, ideologies, ethical norms of behavior and social groups. This has made it easier to accept new ideas, new perspectives, and sometimes even contrary systems, which seamlessly co-exist side by side under the umbrella of Hinduism. As a philosophy, Hinduism includes the monistic system of the Upanishads and Sankara's Vedanta, the pluralistic system of *Vaiseika*, the dualistic system of *Samkhya-Yoga*, the atheistic and materialist system of *Caravakas*. As a religion, Hinduism perceives god as many and also as one, it also conceives God as *Saguna Brahman* (God with quality and *Nirguna Brahman* (God without quality ["He is not this, he is not that."]). In principle, Hinduism incorporates all kinds of seemingly diverse systems of belief and

9. *Radial Pluralism and Truth*, p. 216

worship (without rejecting any). Hinduism sees and reveres the divine in every manifestation. As a result, Hinduism is open and tolerant to other philosophies and religions.

According to Troy Wilson Organ, Hinduism is often considered as the most tolerant religion and the most open-minded of all philosophies. Though he notes examples of intolerance among the Hindus in the second century B.C. these may be considered as exceptions to the general conception of Hinduism as a tolerant religion. The *Vedas* are considered as the earliest recorded history of Indian's spiritual culture. From the time of *Vedas* up until the time of Ramakrishna (1836-1886), who is considered the prophet of modern India, Hinduism has shown tolerance and respect for other religions.

Some examples are illustrative of this larger truth. Before Christianity, a group of Jews came to India and they were given freedom to pursue their own form of worship (their descendants are still there in a few places). St. Thomas, one the apostles of Jesus, traveled to South India where he established Indian Christianity (the Church he founded is still functioning). The Parsis, when they were persecuted in their homeland, came to India. Hindu kings helped the Muslims build their mosques. Religious clashes between Hindus and Muslims started only in the 20th century. These clashes were greatly inspired by politics, with religion being merely used as a pretext.¹⁰ Wendy Doniger explains:

The forced conversion of Hindus by Muslims during the Mughal period and the preferential treatment of Muslims by the British in later centuries were major sources of Hindu intolerance of Muslims.¹¹

The respectful attitudes of Hinduism toward other religions can be best understood through its philosophical basis. As explained earlier, according to the Vedanta the Ultimate Reality is *Brahman*, which is devoid of name, form, or attributes. In the relative universe, the highest manifestation of *Brahman* is the Personal God. Hindus understand this Personal God to be the same (though holding differing names), whether worshiped by Hindus, Jews, Christians or.

10. Swami Nikhilananda, *Inter religious attitudes, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center*, New York, <http://www.hinduism.org.za/inter-re.htm>. (An essay written on December 26, 2002).

11. *Radical Pluralism and Truth*, p. 232.

This Personal God leads the devotees to the realization of the spirit. Self-realization is the central aim of the Hindu religion. Like all other religions, Hindus use images and symbols because the human mind cannot think about anything without a mental image, just as man cannot live without breathing. Just as some believers connect their idea of holiness with the image of a church, a mosque or a cross, Hindus connect the idea of holiness, purity, truth, omnipresence with different symbols and forms. Behind all these images and symbols there is only one Ultimate Reality whom the people of different religions worship under different names.

In Twentieth century Indian Philosophy there was a dominant, dynamic, and catholic outlook towards other religions. During this time, Indian philosophy was dominated, by giant figures: Swami Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi and Radhakrishnan. These great thinkers were very liberal and dynamic in their outlook. They did not believe in sectarian and exclusive religion. They advocated a catholic religion, which was open, dynamic, universal and all embracing. According to Ramakrishna, all religions were true and they all served humanity as pathways to the realization of God. He argued that even though there was (and is) diversity, there was (and is) essential unity among all religions, because the same truth runs through all religions.¹²

Swami Vivekananda, a disciple of Ramakrishna, was one of the Hindu speakers in the World Parliament of Religions, Chicago 1893. This was a remarkable event in the history of inter-religious dialogue where Eastern and Western religions came face to face in dialogue. Swami Vivekananda was a colorful figure in this Parliament of Religions. He called for universal tolerance. Influenced by his guru, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda also stressed that all religions were multiple paths leading to a single goal, even if some paths were more efficient than others. He also recognized that there were multiple true prophets of mankind, prophets such as the Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, and in modern times, Ramakrishna. For him, the essence of their teaching was the same. He wrote:

12. *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, p. 9

My master taught that religion is one; all prophets teach the same; but they can only present the principle in a form; so they take it out of the old form and put it before us in a new one.... In all religions the super-conscious state is identical. Hindus, Christians, Mohammedans, Buddhists, and even those of no creed, all have the very same experience when they transcend the body.¹³

According to Vivekananda religions cannot be contradictory but are, by nature, complementary with respect to their realcore value, interiority. He says that religions “are not contradictory but are supplementary. Each religion takes up, as it were, one part of the great universal truth and spends its whole force in embodying and typifying that part of the great truth.”¹⁴ Only those who are wise can see this reality, but lesser people see contradictions and competition among religions. He believed that religious quarrels are always over the husks, but essentially, all religions are one. He was open to accept truth from all religions. He preached unity and harmony among religions. This unity, however, should not as the triumph of any one religion at the cost of the destruction of others. In his final address to the World Parliament of Religions Vivekananda said,

If the Parliament of Religions has shown anything to the world it is this: It has proved to the world that holiness, purity, and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character. In the face of this evidence, if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart, and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance: Help and not Fight, Assimilation and not Destruction, Harmony and Peace and not Dissension.¹⁵

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan was a well-known Indian philosopher and president of India from 1962 to 1967. He was also a leading interpreter of Hinduism in the West and became a visible symbol of the struggle for world unity and religious tolerance, though he was a

13. Swami Lokeshwaranada (ed), *Swami Vivekananda: His life and Message* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission, 1994), p.31.

14. *The complete works of Vivekananda*, 14th ed. (Advaita Ashrama, 1972) 2.359

15. *Swami Vivekananda: His life and message*, p. 72

bitter critic of religious conversion and dogmatism in monotheistic religions, particularly in Christianity and Judaism.¹⁶ From a religious, pluralistic view he argued that all religions were equally legitimate means of responding to the divine, leading to the same goal. Doctrinal differences were merely culturally conditioned. For in the spiritual and mystical aspects, the essence of all religions was the same. He wrote:

The name by which we call God and the rite by which we approach Him do not matter much...Tolerance is the homage, which the infinite mind pays to the inexhaustibility of the Infinite...There are many possible roads from time to eternity and we need to choose one road...The doctrine we adopt and the philosophy we profess do not matter any more than the language we speak and the clothes we wear.¹⁷

Radhakrishnan advocated the unity of religions from the perspective of the Advaita Vedanta of Hinduism, derived from Shankara, which teaches that there is only one reality, *Nirguna Brahman*. If there is only one reality then the inner core of all religions is also one and true.

Radhakrishnan, Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi through their lives and example called on people to break from narrowness and live the true essence of their respective religions. They believed that the myths, castes, and rituals constitute the body of a religion, which are perishable, but the spirit of Indian religion is open and universal, based on the intuitive experiences of God.

Modern Hinduism claims to work toward building a nation where religious pluralism is recognized. Some political leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, J.L. Nehru, and S. Radhakrishnan attempted to combine political secularism and Hinduism in order to achieve their goals in a newly-independent India. In this approach, Hinduism was not to be adopted as the state religion, but the state was to recognize religious pluralism, granting religious freedom to all. But this view was not welcomed by the Hindu fundamentalists, (a strange seeming

16. Harold Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism*, (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2001), p. 214

17. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western thought*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1939), p. 317-318

contradiction in terms), who demanded that Hinduism be made the state religion. For them, this move was foundational for maintaining national integration.

Today, the Hindu religion is not free from fundamentalism and fanaticism. Religious conflicts have divided India into three: India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. Christianity is seen as the biggest threat to Hinduism. Tensions and confrontations between Hindus and Muslims are deep and complex. This is mainly due to Hindu religious values being overshadowed by politics.¹⁸

Hinduism is the least structured religion. Maybe this is one of the reasons why there is no single coordinating group for inter-religious dialogue. There are, however, many groups and movements such as, the Sai Baba movement, the Divine Life Yoga Society, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (the Hare Krishna Movement), the Ramakrishna Movement, the India Heritage Foundation that organizes inter-religious gatherings and workshops.¹⁹

2. Meaning of Inter-Religious Dialogue in Buddhism

Truth, *Ahimsa*, compassion and tolerance are the most outstanding characteristics of Buddhism. All these characteristics form the foundation for recognizing the existence of other religions. Buddhism did not claim to establish the truth and seek to exclude its opposites as falsehood. Rather, they values and perspectives of other religions were included as other forms of the same truth. Buddhists are generally known for their liberal attitude toward other religions; be they polytheistic, monotheistic or even non-theistic. W. F. Adeney gave the example of what King Asoka cut in stone in the 3rd Century B.C.:

The king, beloved of the God, honors every form of religious faith, but considers no gift or honor so much as the increase of the substance of religions, whereof this is the root- to reverence one's faith and never revile that of others.²⁰

18. Ho Jin Jun, *Religious Pluralism and Fundamentalism in Asia*, (Colorado: International Academic Publisher, 2002), p. 93-105.

19. Marcus Braybrooke, "The Interfaith Movement: The Present Reality", *Vidyajyoti*, (Vol. 56, No.4, 1992) p.189

20. *On Toleration: From Theory to Social Praxis*, p. 107

The religious writings and teachings of Bhikku Buddhadasa, a prominent Thai Buddhist scholar of the 20th century, are very inspiring for their commitment to inter-religious dialogue. For him, religions are by nature close to each other because of the singularity of the truth for which they are all searching. According to Buddhadasa, there are three levels of truth among different religions. First, there is the outermost level where religious traditions appear to be dissimilar in their expressions. The inner level is second, where all the great religions are the same in their essential concerns, such as the elimination of selfishness, self-purification and fostering the inner freedom of love and compassion. The inmost level, or the third level, is where the historical religions in themselves are empty of substantial, independent existence. They are temporal constructs expressing the unconditioned, empty nature of things, which goes beyond the concept of “my religion” or “your religion”.

To explain further his view of these three levels, Buddhadasa takes the analogy of water. On the outer level, various kinds of water may be visible since they come from different sources containing different minerals. But on the inner level when such minerals are removed, all the “waters” turn into the same substance, pure water. Finally, on the inmost level, when water is investigated even the concept of water disappears, only two parts remain, hydrogen and oxygen, which are not water. The substance, which we have been calling water, has disappeared. It is only void, empty. In the same way, one who realizes ultimate truth can also realize that there is no such thing as religion. There is only one ultimate reality that is truth, and this truth cannot be particularized as Buddhism, Christianity or Islam.²¹ His view recognizes the truth in other religions, and certainly creates an atmosphere for sincere dialogue.

Another important aspect of Buddha’s teaching is that he advised his followers not to depend on theories and cults. He advocated the doctrine of self-reliance, purity, peace, compassion and enlightenment. He stressed the need for understanding before accepting anything as truth. He taught neither to totally accept nor reject what others say, because one who always depends on another’s

21. John Makransky, “Buddhist Perspectives on Truth in Other Religions: Past and Present”, *Theological Studies*, (Vol. 64, 2003), p. 357.

ideas is a second class human being. This is why, from the intellectual and philosophical point of view, Buddhism encourages freedom of thought and inquiry. Buddha had the openness and courage to exhort his followers not to accept what he himself had taught without prior examination and conviction. He taught that if someone really believes that he knows the truth, then he should not be afraid to be challenged for truth will always win. The approach of Buddhism is one of seeing and understanding. Likewise, these should be the approach of people dealing with one another: to see and to understand. This aspect of Buddhist teaching provides its followers a space for dialogue with other religions as they seek to know and understand the truth. It makes them more tolerant of others living within heterogeneous societies.

According to Ho Jin Jun even though Buddhism claims to be a tolerant and peaceful religion, in reality some Buddhist countries are replete with violence and bloodshed. There are tensions between Buddhists and members of other religions all over the world, particularly in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Bhutan and Vietnam. Many Buddhist countries have become communist, where religious freedom is restricted. China is a Buddhist country, but allows a very limited freedom of religion. The same situation exists in Vietnam, Mongolia, Cambodia, North Korea and Tibet. Thailand and Myanmar's constitutions guarantee religious freedom, but in reality full freedom of religion is absent due to the compulsory teaching of Buddhism in schools and universities. Hon Jin Jun wrote:

My conclusion here is that Buddhism is no longer a peaceful and tolerant religion. Unlike Islamic fundamentalism, Buddhism fundamentalism is mainly confined to Thailand and Sri Lanka, but most Buddhist nations exclude minority ethnic groups and religions. The observance of pluralism in Buddhist nations cannot, at present, be expected as practical reality.²²

,In his book, "Crossing the Threshold of Hope," Pope John Paul II expounded a critical view on the Buddhist doctrine of salvation saying that the doctrine of salvation in Buddhism and Christianity are opposed. He explains, Christianity looks at reality positively,

22. Ho Jin Jun, *Religious Pluralism and Fundamentalism in Asia*, p. 112

whereas Buddhism perceives the world negatively or as evil. The Pope added:

The Buddhist doctrine of salvation constitutes the central point, or rather the only point, of this system. Nevertheless, both the Buddhist tradition and the methods deriving from it have an almost exclusively negative soteriology."²³

However, the Pope recognizes the spiritual leadership of among other things Buddhist: the Dalai Lama of Tibet, Buddhist spirituality, its method of praying and the moral and ethical values it proclaims. Of course, if we bring metaphysics and theology into the discussion, there are many differences; there is no way to get away from these differences. However, if we communicate on spiritual, moral and ethical grounds, we find more commonalities than differences.

Buddhism teaches that in order to be liberated one has to escape from the world to reach the mystical union with the Ultimate Reality, which is *Nirvana*. Because of its fundamental teaching on liberation and enlightenment, Buddhism is often considered as individualistic religion. However, in the present time Buddhism is deeply involved in social work and community development. Buddha did not teach his followers to escape society permanently for enlightenment. Walpola Rahula, a Sri Lankan Buddhist monk, makes this clear,

It may perhaps be useful in some cases for a person to live in retirement for a time in order to improve his or her mind and character, as preliminary moral, spiritual, and intellectual training, to be strong enough to come out later and help others. But if someone lives an entire life in solitude, thinking only of their own happiness and salvation, without caring for their fellow beings, this surely is not in keeping with the Buddha's teaching which is based on love, compassion, and service to others."²⁴

According to Marcus Braybrooke, because of growing social awareness, Buddhism is playing an increasingly active role in inter-religious activities. The work for peace, social harmony, and social

23. John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, Alfred A. Knopf, (New York: 1994), p.85

24. Walpola Rahula, *The social teachings of the Buddha, in The path of Compassion*, edited by Fred Eppsteiner Berkeley, (California: Parallax Press, 1988), pp. 103-104.

welfare has led some Buddhists to increasingly cooperate with the people of other religions. There are many movements in Japan that are very supportive of inter-religious dialogue. Dr. Shinichiro Imaoka, who was the president of the Japan Free Religious Fellowship, was a pioneer of inter-religious co-operation. The Dalai Lama has also played a significant role in the support of many inter-religious activities. His active participation in The World Day of Prayer for Peace at Assisi in 1996 encouraged many other religious leaders to participate. He has traveled all over the world and encouraged people to promote peace and inter-religious harmony. In Sri Lanka, Dr. Ariyaratne has played a significant role in the promotion of peace and communal harmony.

In 1989 forty-five Buddhist representatives from all over Asia, Europe and America got together to see how they could respond to global problems and bring social justice. At that time they formed INEB, (International Network of Engaged Buddhists), with the following objectives:

1. To promote understanding between Buddhist countries and various Buddhist sects.
2. To facilitate and engage in solving problems in various countries.
3. To help bring the perspective of engaged Buddhism to bear in working on these problems
4. To act as a clearinghouse of information on existing engaged Buddhist (and relevant non-Buddhist) groups and activities, and aid in the co-ordination of efforts wherever possible.²⁵

To accomplish these objectives, Buddhists recognized the need to work closely with other religious groups who share similar concerns.

Dialogue between Buddhists and Christians in North America is also taking on a theological and academic character. Both Buddhists and Christians are learning from each other's moral and spiritual heritage. They are growing in mutual understanding. Dr. John Berthrong, Dean of the School of heology at Boston University describes this experience.

25. *Pilgrimage of Hope*, p. 264

Christians have learned that Buddhism has a long and noble history of social ethics. And Buddhists have realized that the Christian notion of God is not some kind of simple-minded anthropomorphism. Old images have been replaced with the realization that Buddhism and Christianity are evolving, living communities of faith.²⁶

The Buddhist way of meditation and concentration is becoming increasingly familiar among Christians. Many Christian contemplatives are interested in learning Buddhist methods for concentration and meditation. Numerous Catholic priests, nuns and monks have come to *Dharamsala*, India to learn these skills in order to bring back these spiritual experiences to their own traditions. The rich ethical and spiritual values of Buddhism and its social involvement in the present world are having a great impact on the hearts and minds of millions of people around the world.

3. Meaning of Inter-Religious Dialogue in Christianity

The Catholic Church is one of the most involved Christian churches in relation to inter-religious activities. From a historical perspective it is interesting to see how the Church's view of other religions has changed over the years. From the very beginning of the early Church, Christians felt they were marginalized and threatened by the Jewish religious establishment and were, as a result, defensive in their relation to the Jews. But when Christianity entered into Greek culture, Christians were fascinated by the mystical insights and philosophical speculation of the Greek thinkers. They made use of Greek concepts of Logos and Sophia in Christian theology. However, they simultaneously sought to distance themselves from the Greek religious and ritual practices. In other words, they adopted Greek philosophies but rejected their religions. Early Church Fathers were logos-centered in their worldview, particularly St. Justin, Irenaeus, and Clement of Alexandria. They found the Greek notion of logos a uniquely valuable insight to express the reality manifested in Jesus Christ. The Divine Logos was manifested in Christianity through its embodiment in Jesus Christ.

It was St. Augustine who opened the universal, ecclesiological perspective viewing other religions as integral parts of the single

26. *Ibid.* p.240

plan of salvation. But later, when confronting Pelagius, he began to advocate a more exclusive ecclesiology. In 430, when the enemies of the Church captured Rome, Augustine became even more exclusive toward other religions.²⁷

In the Middle Ages Islam emerged as a military threat to Christianity. Out of this threat, a more dogmatic Christianity emerged, one convinced of its own unique status as the only true religion. Crusaders converted the cross into a weapon to face the Muslim invaders. (In contrast, the Moors in Spain lived in harmony with the Christians they conquered for 400 years.) The attitude of the Church towards other religions became not only progressively negative but also aggressive. This was perhaps exemplified at the Council of Florence (1442) during which the Church made a decree:

The Holy Roman Church firmly believes, professes and preaches that no one remaining outside the Catholic Church, not only pagans but also Jews, heretics or schismatics, can become partakers of eternal life; but they will go to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels unless before the end of their life they are received into it... And no one can be saved no matter how much alms he has given even if he sheds his blood for the name of Christ, unless he remains in the bosom and unity of the Catholic Church.²⁸

With this decree, “outside of the Church no salvation” took on a certain dogmatic character. This statement dominated the church for centuries and changed the view of the church toward other religions. This decree greatly influenced and popularized , missionary movements. It was in the 1950s that the Church began to enter into a new age. During this time, Christians’ views of other religions began to change radically. The Church began to recognize the unity of humanity, the plurality of religions and the seeds of logos hidden in other religions.

Pope Paul VI’s encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam*, issued in 1964, was the first major document of the Catholic Church that talked about inter-religious dialogue. These ideas were forwarded in the Vatican document, the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*). Here the Catholic Church recognized the presence of truth in the other great religions of the

27. *Dialogue Resource Manual for Catholic in Asia*, p.53

28. *Ibid.*, p. 57

world and drew the outlines of the Church's new view on the other religions. This document specifically mentioned Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. And it declared:

- From ancient times down to the present, there is found among various peoples a certain perception of that hidden power which hovers over the course of things and over the events of human history; at times some indeed have come to the recognition of a Supreme Being, or even of a Father. This perception and recognition penetrates their lives with a profound religious sense.
- Religions, however, that are bound up with an advanced culture have struggled to answer the same questions by means of more refined concepts and a more developed language.
- In Hinduism, men contemplate the divine mystery and express it through an inexhaustible abundance of myths and through searching philosophical inquiry. They seek freedom from the anguish of our human condition either through ascetical practices or profound meditation or a flight to God with love and trust.
- Buddhism, in its various forms, realizes the radical insufficiency of this changeable world; it teaches a way by which men, in a devout and confident spirit, may be able either to acquire the state of perfect liberation, or attain, by their own efforts or through higher help, supreme illumination. Likewise, other religions found everywhere try to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing "ways," comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites.
- The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men.
- The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian

faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men.

- The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. In addition, they await the Day of Judgment when God will render their deserts to all those who have been raised up from the dead. Finally, they value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.³²

This document opened the door for dialogue and collaboration between the Church and other religions, moving her considerably away from her traditional teaching that no one outside the Church could be saved. It recognized that truth is reflected in other religions of the world and that all who cooperate with the grace of God can be saved.

Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience- those too may achieve eternal salvation. Nor shall divine providence deny the assistance necessary for salvation to those who without any fault of theirs have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, and who, not without grace, strive to lead a good life.³⁰

Subsequently, the Church established the Pontifical Council for the Relationship of the Church with Non-Christian Religions in view of

32. "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," *Nostra Aetate*, Proclaimed Pope Paul by His Holiness, VI, on October 28, 1965. http://www.vatican.va/archives/hist_councils/ii_v

30. Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, 16

31. Pope John Paul II, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, (May 19, 1991), No.13.

continuing a permanent programme for inter-religious dialogue and religious harmony. Vatican officials and the Pope himself have taken many initiatives promoting inter-religious dialogue and prayer, including that mentioned earlier in Assisi in 1988. Pope John Paul II, in his encyclicals, *Redemptor Hominis*, *Redemptoris Missio*, *Veritatis Splendor* and *Fides et Ratio*, has specifically addressed the issue of dialogue with the peoples of other faiths.

“Dialogue and Proclamation” was jointly issued by the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples in 1991. This document was another milestone for the official Roman Catholic Church regarding the nature of the Church and its mission. Although dialogue with the people of other religions had certainly been encouraged since Vatican II, never had the Church said that she should dialogue with other religions to carry out her mission and identity. In this declaration, “Dialogue and Proclamation”, the Church for the first time accepted dialogue as one of the principle elements of her mission and identity. The document stated that she dialogues “with the followers of other religious traditions in order to walk together toward truth and to work together in projects of common concern.”³¹ What is most surprising in this document is that it described a whole new vision and philosophy of dialogue in view of the Church’s identity and mission. The following aspects of this important document need to be highlighted:

A. Dialogue as Mutual Enrichment

This document, “Dialogue and Proclamation”, gives a deep meaning to inter-religious dialogue. Here dialogue is not understood as a mere tactic to make the Christian truth more acceptable by all. Neither does the document present dialogue as an opportunity for persons of one faith to be humble enough to let persons of other faiths speak, hoping when it is their turn they will be able to deliver their message more effectively. Rather, the document stated that dialogue is a two-way process where both sides, with the same degree of sincerity and intensity, are called to speak and listen. It says that dialogue is a method and means of mutual knowledge and enrichment.

Dialogue means all positive and constructive inter-religious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths,

which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment, in obedience to truth and respect for freedom.³²

B. Requires Honesty and Self-conviction

For mutual enrichment to be possible through dialogue both sides are required to be honest and to express with self-conviction that which comes from their own religious faith. Therefore, to dialogue is not to compromise or make concession with one's religious self-conviction. Dialogue requires, as "Dialogue and Proclamation" says, "a mutual witness of one's beliefs and a common exploration of one's respective religious convictions"³³ Of course, dialogue always offers an opportunity for the elimination of prejudices, intolerance, and misunderstanding.

C. Openness to Truth

Truth is one of the most basic foundations for dialogue. For meaningful dialogue both sides have to recognize the existence of truth in the other religion. "Dialogue and Proclamation" puts forth that Christians should acknowledge that they have something to learn from other religious traditions. The truth and positive values of other religions can offer a positive challenge toward the self-purification and the removal of prejudices in all believers. "Dialogue and Proclamation" testifies to this when it states, "Christians too must allow themselves to be questioned... The way Christians sometime understand their religion and practice may be in need of purification"³⁴

D. Readiness for Change and Growth

The document "Dialogue and Proclamation" enunciates a fourfold typology of dialogue: dialogue of life, dialogue of deeds, dialogue of discourse and dialogue of religious experiences.³⁵ The goal of dialogue is a deeper conversion towards God. It is the truth found in dialogue that will enable those engaged to be converted toward God. In dialogue, therefore, one must authentically be ready to grow and change, open even to the possibility of allowing one's previous

32. *Ibid.*, No. 9

33. *Ibid.*, 40, 9.

34. *Ibid.*, 32

35. *Ibid.*, 42

religious identity to change. “Dialogue and Proclamation explains, “Among the “dispositions required” for real dialogue is “the will to engage together in commitment to the truth the readiness to allow oneself to be transformed by the encounter.”³⁶ It further states, “In this process of conversion, the decision may be made to leave one’s previous spiritual or religious situation in order to direct oneself toward another.”³⁷

In his *Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Asia*, Pope John Paul II recognized Asia as the cradle of the world’s major religions, and its richness in religious traditions and values. He expressed a sincere desire to enter into dialogue with Asians.

Asia is also the cradle of the World’s major religions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. It is the birthplace of many other spiritual traditions such as Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, Sikhism and Shintoism. Millions also espouse traditional or tribal religions, with varying degrees of structured ritual and formal religious teaching. The Church has the deepest respect for these traditions and seeks to engage in sincere dialogue with their followers. The religious values they teach await their fulfillment in Jesus Christ.³⁸

The importance of dialogue may well be derived from pastoral charity. In today’s world reality, so marked by global conflicts along religious lines, dialogue is a matter of pastoral urgency for the Church because it is a matter related to the very survival of the entire human community. While making his missionary journeys, Pope John Paul II always took the opportunity to meet with non-Christian leaders. His 1996 call to the world’s religious leaders in Assisi made a significant, as well as symbolic, impact on the minds of non-Christian and Christian leaders. The second World Day of Prayer for peace among religious leaders in Assisi in January 2002 was expressly convened in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States.

36. Ibid., 47

37. Ibid., 41

38. Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, (November 6, 1999), No. 6.

Many Christian theologians today place the task of theology within an inter-religious context, exposing theologians and non-theologians alike to the religious traditions of others. Looking at the problem of Christian exclusivism Lucien Richard raises a challenging question:

Can Christianity accept other religious traditions as valid ways to salvation without giving-up its fundamental conviction about the absoluteness and uniqueness of Jesus Christ? Is it possible to believe simultaneously that God has acted decisively and for the salvation of all in the person of Jesus Christ and that Jews, Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists are warranted in remaining who they are and following their own different ways to salvation?³⁹

This question remains valid and challenging. Since Vatican II, the Church has been moving toward accepting dialogue as an important part of its mission. The Church has discovered anew her identity in dialogue as she fulfills her mission. As Pope Paul VI prophetically stated in his encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* of 1964, "Dialogue is the new way of being Church."

4. Meaning of Inter-Religious Dialogue In Islam

Among the four religions mentioned in this study, Islam is the youngest, but it is the second largest religion in the world. It is a religion which is based on the fundamental principle of the oneness of God. According to Prof. Sydur Rahman, Islam does not claim to be a new religion, and it is un-Islamic to claim that there have been no true religions before Islam. The Qur'an teaches the Muslim to believe not only what Prophet Mohammad revealed but also to believe what other prophets before him revealed as well. Prof. S. Rahman further claims "All monotheists may be called Muslims in the sense that they believe in one God, but they cannot be called Mumins."⁴⁰ (The Islamic faith has two parts. The first part is the believing in one God and the second part is the believing in Prophet Mohammad. Those who believe in both are called Mumins and those who believe only in the first part are only Muslims).

39 Richard Lucien, *What are they saying about Christ and World Religions?*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), p. 3

40. *Islamic Culture and Philosophy*, p. 29

Islam has inherited the spiritual wealth of earlier revealed religions. The Qur'an contains the fundamental teachings of the other revealed books of the world. Because of this, one could argue that Islam is the religion that was preached by Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. The truth in essence remains the same, but is modified by different preachers in different times and in varying conditions of human life.⁴¹ These common traditions and spiritual heritage bring Islam close to monotheistic religions for dialogue. In the Qur'an, dialogue among Jews, Christians and Muslims is not only permitted but greatly encouraged:

Say (O Muhammad): we believe in *Allah* and that which is related unto us and that which was revealed unto Abraham and Israel and Isaac and Jacob and the Tribes, and that which was vouchsafed unto Moses and Jesus and the Prophet from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them and unto Him we surrender.
(Surah 3:84)

The teaching of the Qur'an recognizes not only the existence of other religious traditions but also reaffirms the existence of truth in other religions and scriptures. It is also the view of the Qur'an that all messengers of God have preached basically the same truth and values. In other words, the spirit of the religions (Din) is the same, but the ways of realizing it externally (Shariah) may differ. Religious pluralism is recognized as part of the divine plan. God could have created a world in which men and women were alike in every way, following one religion, but He did not will it that way. Diversity is enrichment and living in tolerance with each other is seen as the doing of good. One reads in the Qur'an:

If *Allah* so willed, He could have made you a simple people, but His plan is to test you in what He has given you, so strive as in a race in all virtues. The return of you all is to *Allah*. It is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which you dispute.
(Surah 5:51)

In the Qur'an, Jews and Christians are called "the people of the Book" (ahl al-kitab). This displays a commitment to religious tolerance towards Jews and Christians. In order to move toward acceptance of each other's beliefs, Surah 3:65 states: "O people of

41. *Ibid.*, p. 29

the Book, why dispute about Abraham? The Torah and the Gospel were sent down after him: do you not understand?" The Qur'an requires Muslims to engage with the people of the Book in the best possible manner. The true basis for inter-religious dialogue is equality, justice and kindness (Surah 60:8).

Jesus as prophet is greatly honored in the Qur'an. The name of Jesus occurs in the Qur'an over 25 times. Muslims honor Him as one of the foremost, righteous prophets created by God. As Prof. Qamar-ul Huda of Boston College writes,

In the Islamic tradition the stories of Jesus' poverty, charity, benevolence, teachings on spirituality, and uncompromising love to all are imbedded in the essential teaching of Islamic religious education. Still today, whenever there is a reference to Jesus, pious and conscious-minded Muslims will mention, on whom be peace.⁴²

The term "people of the Book" mentioned in the *Qur'an*, specifically includes Jews, Christians and Muslims. Many Islamic scholars, however, have stated that the term could also be applied to any religion with scriptures. In other words, it could be applied to Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and other traditions.⁴³ On scriptural grounds, Islam is open to dialogue with all religious traditions that follow scripture.

Fethullah Gulen is an Islamic scholar in Turkey, who has promoted dialogue in order to engender mutual understanding and tolerance among religions. According to him "religion is a system of belief embracing all races and all beliefs, a road bringing everyone together in Brotherhood."⁴⁴ Looking at the present realities and challenges of the world today, Fethullah Gulen has concluded that the root cause of these problems is the materialist world-view, which greatly limits religion's influence in the present social life. In order to bring peace and harmony into the social setting, inter-religious dialogue is indispensable. In explaining the aim and importance of dialogue he has said,

42. Qamar-ul Huda, "Knowledge of Allah and the Islamic view of Other Religions", *Theological Studies*, No.64, (2003), p. 298

43. *Ibid.*, p. 295

44. Ali Unal and Alphonse Milliams (compiled), *Advocate of Dialogue*, (Virginia: The Fountain, 2000), p. 242

The goal of dialogue among world religions is not simply to destroy scientific materialism and the destructive materialistic worldview; rather, the very nature of religion demands this dialogue. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and even Hinduism and other world religions accept the same source for themselves, and including Buddhism, pursue the same goal.⁴⁵

According to Fethullah Gulan, the pillars of dialogue are four universal values: love, compassion, tolerance and forgiveness. Love is the most essential element in every being and a most radiant light, it is a great force, which can resist and overcome every other force. Every human being must show compassion because this is a requirement of being human. Man must forgive because God showed His attribute of forgiveness through individual human beings and He also put the beauty of forgiveness in their heart. Tolerance is sometimes used in place of respect and mercy, generosity and forbearance. This is the most essential element of the moral system for peaceful co-existence and spiritual discipline in social life.⁴⁶

Islam is facing challenges in inter-religious relations, particularly with Western religions. Many Muslims believe that Western policies are enacted as part of a plan to weaken Muslim power in the world. Because of the bloody historical experience of confrontation with the west and Christianity, many educated and conscious Muslims believe that for 1000 years the West has been engaged in systematic aggression against Muslims. At the same time, Islam has often been misunderstood by the West in a manner that reduces religion to a political ideology. For centuries, Christians have been told that Islam was a distorted version of Judaism and Christianity. This historical portrayal of Islam weakens the courage of Muslims to enter into dialogue with other religions. For this reason, the Catholic Church's call for dialogue was accepted with considerable suspicion.⁴⁷

Islam as religion, however, preaches freedom, respect for human life and promotes sincere dialogue and tolerance of other religions. As Prof. Niyazi Oktem writes:

45. *Ibid.*, p. 242

46. *Ibid.*, p. 253-5

47. *Ibid.*, p. 243-44

Freedom, democracy, and respect for all human beings are not just Western principles. True Muslims also advocate these principles. They support dialogue, tolerance, and respect for other's beliefs. They seek to implement these concepts in their own lives, and arrange meetings for this purpose. Sure of themselves, they do not fear dialogue. True Westerners and true democrats also are like this. Deviations should be ignored. If both sides have fully assimilated their respective religion or ideology, there is nothing to fear.⁴⁸

During the last few decades many Islamic groups have engaged in inter-religious dialogue, the Islamic Conference of Jeddah, the World Muslim League, and the World Muslim Congress to name but a few. The representatives from the world Islamic organization regularly meet with the Vatican and the world Christian Churches in regards to inter-religious dialogue. The World Muslim League has an officer in Geneva to work on inter-religious affairs.⁴⁹ Looking at global challenges today, Abdullah Omar Naseef, the secretary general of the Mecca-based Muslim League, encouraged religious groups to work together as members of the human family to meet the challenges. He writes,

These problems are not Christian problems or Muslim problems. These are problems of humanity. We, as members of the human family, bear a grave responsibility toward them, as religious groups informed by divine vision of human relationship, our responsibility is even greater.⁵⁰

48. *Ibid.*, p. 276

49. *Pilgrimage of Hope*, p. 263-4

50. Abdullah Omar Naseef, "Muslim-Christian Relations: Muslim Approach," *Current Dialogue*, (Geneva, Switzerland: December 1986).

CHAPTER THREE

GANDHI'S OBJECTIVE VIEW OF RELIGION

I. GANDHI'S RELIGIOUS VIEW

A. Introduction

It is an undeniable fact that religion plays an important role in human life within society. Authentic religious practice does not touch only one aspect of human life; rather, it influences all human conduct in thought, word and deed. Before proceeding to Gandhi's view of religion, it is important to discuss in brief the meaning of religion.

The English word "religion" is derived from the Latin word ("religio"-reverence, which is from "*religo-are*"-to bind-Gandhi uses the latter a lot.) which means "*good faith,*" "*ritual,*" and other similar meanings. It is not easy to define religion, because different thinkers of different religious traditions perceive religion in a myriad of ways. Some thinkers view religion in reference to God or gods; some do not. Some view religion as a belief system; while others prefer to focus on ritual, ethics or some other aspects. According to Webster's New World Dictionary (3rd edition) religion is: "any specific system of belief and worship, often involving a code of ethics and a philosophy." This definition would exclude religions that do not engage in worship. It implies that there are two important components to religion: one's belief and worship in a deity or deities, and one's ethical behavior towards other human beings.

According to John Hick religion is: "an understanding of the universe, together with an appropriate way of living in it, which involves reference beyond the natural world to God, to gods, or to a transcendental order or process."¹ Emile Durkheim described religion

1. John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, (London: Collins, 1977), p. 133

as “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things.”² Both of these definitions emphasize the relationship between humans and the transcendent or the sacred. To understand the meaning of religion in a broader sense, Ninian Smart explains religion as consisting of a number of different dimensions. These were:

- a. The ritual dimension: This includes visible rites, ceremonies, religious prayer services, sacrifices, etc.
- b. The narrative or mythic dimension: The collection of myths, images and stories through which the invisible, transcendent world is symbolically expressed.
- c. The doctrinal and philosophical dimension: The systematic attempt to explain and clarify the essential beliefs of a religious tradition.
- d. The social and institutional dimension: This dimension reflects on the desired relationship among the believers in the religious community and also the institutions that provide necessary structure and organization to the religious tradition.
- e. The experiential and emotional dimension: This dimension reflects on the believer’s active participation in rituals such as worship, prayer and meditation.
- f. The material dimension: This dimension is expressed in material form of identity with a religion, such as sacred sites, magnificent buildings, works of art, etc.
- g. The ethical and legal dimension: This dimension includes moral and ethical teaching of a particular religious tradition that believers are expected to put into practice in their daily lives.³

Smart’s analysis of these seven dimensions of religion clearly indicates that religion cannot be identified simply as a set of beliefs or doctrines. For a deeper understanding of religion, one has to bring all seven dimensions into consideration and concert. Another important aspect of Smart’s view of religion is that there is a close

2. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, (New York: Free Press, 1965), p.62

3. Ninian Smart, *The World’s Religions*,(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 11-22

relationship between religion and culture. The ritual, ethical and social dimensions give expression to cultural institutions and practices. Therefore, to understand a particular religion, one has to understand the particular culture in which that religion is developed.

B. Meaning of Religion for Gandhi

The Sanskrit word “*Dharma*” is literally translated into English as Religion. There is, however, no parallel word in English that can truly capture the essence of the word *Dharma*. Its use has a much wider connotation than what we ordinarily mean by religion. The word ‘*Dharma*’ is derived from the root ‘*Dhre*’ which means to sustain, to uphold or to nourish. Thus, *Dharma* is the greatest sustaining or binding force in the society. The aim of *Dharma* is to create mental, spiritual and ethical fellowship for all men and for all living entities to be in harmony with each other.

Dharma has passed through several transitions of meaning throughout the history of Indian religious and philosophical traditions. In the Vedas, it is used to denote religious rites and rituals. In the *Atharva-Veda* (IX.9.17), *Dharma* is used to signify the virtues required of a man before he can perform certain religious duties and rituals. In the *Braharanyaka Upanisad* (I.14.14), *Dharma* is described as equivalent to *satya* (truth). In *Chandogya Upanisad* (II.23), three branches of *Dharma* are mentioned which relate separately to the duties of the householder, the sage and the pupil. In the *Mahabharata* (115.1), *Ahimsa* is regarded as the highest *Dharma*. It is clear that *Dharma* includes religious rites, rituals, virtues and ethical and moral duties toward men and society, with *Satya* and *Ahimsa* being two essential ethical principles of *Dharma*. The word *Dharma* was not used in connection with any particular religion; it embraces any religion, any custom and any creed. *Dharma* is eternal.⁴

Gandhi was born into an orthodox Hindu family. He had strong faith in the religion and philosophy of the *Vedas*, *Upanisads* and *Bhagavad Gita*. The beginnings of his philosophy of religion has to be understood within the perspective of the Hindu concept of

4. Ram Candra Gupta, *The wonder that is Hindu Dharma*, (Delhi, B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1987), p.17-19

Dharma and its philosophy. Gandhi's perspective on religion, however, was broader. To explain religion, he used an image of a tree. According to him religion was like a tree, which has only one trunk but different branches. There is only one true and perfect religion, but passing through the human medium it takes on the appearance of having many branches.⁵

Gandhi did not prize his own Hindu religion as superior to all other religions. Calling himself a 'seeker of Truth', he meant that he was a 'seeker of God', for Truth is God. Consequently, he was open to accepting the truth of all religions. Buddhists and Jainas did not believe in God, but Gandhi had no reason to disrespect their faith because they also sought Truth. After a long, careful study of the major religions of the world, Gandhi concluded that the essence of all religions is one. That essence is to believe in the one God. Religions, with their external practice of rituals and their following of dogmas and doctrines, are not ends in themselves, but rather, different means to attain the same goal. All religions are true, but are imperfect due to the fallibility of the human touch. God revealed all religions and God's revelation is perfect. Our human understanding of religion and its practices, however, is imperfect. Gandhi wrote, "By religion, I do not mean formal religion, or customary religion, but that religion which underlines all religions, which bring us face to face with our Maker."⁶

From the writings of Gandhi it is very clear that he was a deeply religious man. The truthfulness of his father and the saintliness of his mother made deep impressions on his life. While he was in school he studied the *Ramayana*, one of the greatest devotional books in Hindu literature. In England he had time to read about other religions. He read the *Gita* for the first time and while in Europe, he had prolonged and sustained contact with Christianity. In South Africa he spent a lot of time searching for God and reading about other religions. All these studies, experiences and searching helped Gandhi to develop his own religious concept.

According to Gandhi, religion meant to accept God for life and to be religious meant to be bound to God. Gandhi believed that when

5. *Gandhi on Christianity*, p. 65

6. *The Message of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 34

God ruled one's ideals, thoughts, words, behavior, and one's very actions, that person becomes truly religious. Being bound to God and having God rule one's life, therefore means that all activities must be derived from religion. Gandhi wrote, "you must watch my life how I live, eat, sit, talk, and behave in general. The sum total of all those in me is my religion...Religion should pervade every one of our actions."⁷

1. No Particularism

Gandhi did not favor any particular historical religion. For him any hierarchy of religions was anathema: no religion was superior over any other and neither was any religion inferior. All religions were true and divinely inspired. But all religions had limitations and shortcomings. These limitations were not because there were mistakes in God's revelation, but rather, because of the human acceptance and understanding of God's revelation. God is perfect in revealing religion within a particular culture, but as soon as it is expressed in human language and culture, being touched by the human, it becomes imperfect. All religions have errors because they are revealed by God but constructed and formulated by human beings.

In the search of Truth, Gandhi sought the best in all religions and found that the essence of all religions is the same. Of course, by religion Gandhi did not mean any formal or customary religion, because true religion is greater than formal religions. For him religions were means through which we purify ourselves, bringing positive changes in our human nature, searching and realizing our oneness with the Creator God. He clarified his religious concept with the following words:

Let me explain what I mean by religion. It is not the Hindu religion which I certainly prize above all other religions, but the religion which transcends Hinduism, which changes one's very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and which ever purifies. It is the permanent element in human nature which counts no cost too great in order to find full expression and which leaves the soul utterly restless until it has found itself, known its Maker and appreciated the true correspondence between the Maker and itself.⁸

7. *Harijan*, Sept. 22, 1946, p. 321

8. *Young India*, May 12, 1920, p. 2

The one and perfect religion to which Gandhi refers is the one that transcends all historical religions. None of the historical religions are capable of fully realizing the perfect religion within finite existence. No religion can claim absolute monopoly of truth. Religions are not perfect, but only God alone. Religions are not God but different ways to God. But these religions are important to perceive the meaning of Religion that transcendent all other religions. All these religions share the truth about the ultimate Truth. For this reason all religions were as dear to Gandhi as his own. Even in regards to religious scripture he did not make any exclusive statement as he wrote, "I do not believe in the exclusive divinity of the Vedas. I believe the Bible, the Koran, and the Zend Avesta to be as much divinely inspired as the Vedas."⁹

2. Unity in Diversity

Gandhi was not and never intended to be a founder of any religion. His religious concepts harmonize all religions. The living of his concepts gave that harmony substance. Therefore, religious pluralism was not a problem for Gandhi. He did not try to unite the religions of the world. Rather, he perceived one religion underneath the many. This religion was the religion of humanity, which includes the best of all religions. However, he never dreamt that there would be only one religion practiced in the world. In theory, we could think that since there is one God, so too, there would be one religion. However, in practice, there are many ways to realize God. Thus, Gandhi considered all religions as means to attain the one and same God who is also the cornerstone of all religions.¹⁰ It did not matter if some took different roads as long as they reached the same goal. As all religions had some moral principles, they were more or less true, but none of them were perfect. Gandhi wrote,

My Hindu instinct tells me that all religions are more or less true. All proceed from the same God, but all are imperfect because they have come down to us through imperfect human instrumentality.¹¹

9. Homer A. Jack (ed), *The Gandhi Reader, A source Book of His life and Writings*, (Madras: Samata Books, 1983), p. 168.

10. *The Message of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 37

11. *Young India*, May 29, 1924, p. 180

Believing all religions were equal, Gandhi held that no one could claim his or her religion as superior to others. For this reason what was needed in a person was tolerance and mutual respect toward all religions. Equal respect for other religions was one's duty because one's own religion was equally imperfect, as were others. Therefore, a person's living tolerantly and respectfully towards other religions will consequently make unity visible in the face of diversity.

C. Importance of Religion

According to Gandhi no one could live without religion.¹² Atheists, who said they had nothing to do with religion, Gandhi compared to men who said they breathe but do not have noses.¹³ Atheists admitted moral order and searched for truth, therefore, in Gandhi's mind they did live within religion. To prove the importance of religion in peoples' lives, Gandhi shared his personal experience:

I could not live for a single second without religion...I go further and say that every activity of a man of religion must be derived from his religion, because religion means being bound to God, that is to say God rules your every breath.¹⁴

In his own land Gandhi saw Hindus and Muslims fighting each other in the name of religion. Gandhi made it clear that no religion taught to kill those who espoused a different faith. Gandhi's principles of truth, non-violence, *Brahmacharya*, non-possession and non-stealing came from his religion. Religion was absolutely necessary for Gandhi in order too keep moral order in society, to live in mutual respect and bring peace and harmony in the world.

D. Gandhi's Religious Practices

Every religion is grounded on faith and certain convictions. Faith gives men assurance of things only hoped and the conviction of things not yet seen. According to Gandhi, Faith is nothing but a living, wide-awake, consciousness of the God within. A true religion consists of having faith in God and living in the presence of God. Our attention is drawn to this faith, which was so strongly reflected in the religious practice of *Mahatma* Gandhi. In order to practice

12. *Ibid*, January 23, 1930, p. 30

13. *Ibid*.

14. *Harijan*, March 2, 1934, p. 23

religion and to express his faith, Gandhi gave great importance to self-purification through prayer, fasting and consecration.

1. Fasting

It is impossible to practice non-violence without self-purification, through prayer and fasting. Fasting is a Hindu religious practice to control and discipline one's physical and carnal desires. Fasting is not just abstinence from food. When the physical body fasts, the mind has to cooperate. For Gandhi fasting was a religious duty toward God. It was a means to discipline and purify the self, and to surrender to God. It was the truest prayer. Fasting helped one to be prepared for prayer, because without fasting, prayer was impossible. Through fasting, one's senses and passion; the soul could be united to God in prayer more easily.

Gandhi also considered his fasting as non-violence in action. His fasting was a non-violent means to solve conflicts and to bring justice and peace. For Gandhi, fasting not only aids in the development of a great moral and spiritual person, but it also affects the opponent of the one who fasts, without doing any harm to the opponent. Gandhi wrote, "Fasting... is the greatest force because of the limitless scope it affords for self-suffering without causing or intending any physical or material injury to the wrongdoer." He further said, "Fasting under proper circumstances is such an appeal par excellence."¹⁵

2. Prayer

Gandhi was a man of prayer. For him, prayer was not just uttering or muttering God's name. It was the yearning of the soul to merge with the divine essence. There must be infinite faith and absolute surrender of the self in prayer. The prayer should come from the heart. For Gandhi effective prayer did not need any speech; perfect silence should be observed at the time of prayer. Gandhi experienced the power of prayer in his own life and told about the necessity of prayer:

As food is necessary for the body, prayer is necessary for the soul.
A man may be able to do without food for a number of days, as

15. Dennis Dalton (ed), *Mahatma Gandhi, Selected Political Writings*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996), p. 88.

MacSwiney did for over 70 days- but believing in God, man cannot, should not live a moment without prayer.¹⁶

The person who had strong conviction that God was within him could truly pray. God does not need our prayer, but Gandhi told us from his experience that people who did not pray were losers. God answers all prayers in His own way. No prayer is in vain, it bears fruit in every person's life.¹⁷

3. Service to humanity

In religion there is worship, but if one is not ready to make sacrifices for social service, worship is meaningless. It is sinful to worship without sacrifice in the service of humanity. For Gandhi, prayer and service always went together. It was impossible to pray without serving the poor. In other words, for Gandhi, to pray was to serve and service was sincere prayer and worship. As he wrote,

A prayerful heart is the vehicle and service makes the heart prayerful. Those Hindus who in this age serve the 'untouchables' from a full heart truly pray, the Hindus and those others who spin prayerfully for the poor and the indigent truly pray.¹⁸

Gandhi's spinning wheel had symbolic meaning, encapsulating the religious practice of love and non-violence. Spinning served the poor, extended love to humanity and helped realize the truth. His political activities were also part of his religious practice. Fundamentally, Gandhi was involved in politics because of his religion, to give greater service to his countrymen and the whole of humanity.

Gandhi's ashram vows, specially his five religious principles of non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, *brahmacharya*, non-possession, were expressions of his religious faith. Gandhi's religious practice was not limited only to cultic rituals, but was in all his thoughts, words and deeds. Gandhi could not conceive of religion as being compartmentalized, separate from all other aspects of his life. For him, life was an integrated whole.

16. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p.87

17. *Ibid.*, p. 91

18. *Ibid.*, p. 217

E. Religion and Truth

Religions are not ends in themselves; rather, they are each important means to attain the same end, which is Truth. The ultimate Truth is God. All religions are searching for the Truth and in this respect Truth is the foundation of all religions. According to Gandhi all religions are different roads to the same goal. Gandhi often quoted the Sanskrit verse: "There is no higher religion than Truth."¹⁹ So, searching for Truth using the method of non-violence was the essential religion of Gandhi. He believed that living in Truth was the basis for the ideal life and it that it was also the goal towards which man must strive. Truth cannot be attained without non-violent means. For Gandhi the end and the means are the same. That is why he believed that non-violence or *Ahimsa* was the heart of all religions. For this reason Truth and religion always go hand in hand. Truth, as the Eternal principle, is the first principle of religion, thus, to attempt to realize the Truth in thought, word and action is the substance of all religions. As Gandhi said, "Devotion to Truth is the sole justification for our existence."²⁰

F. Religion and Morality

The aim of Mahatma Gandhi was not only to humanize religion but also to moralize it. He rejected any religious doctrine, which contradicted morality. To him religion and morality are inseparable. As he said, "I reject any religious doctrine that does not appeal to reason and is in conflict with morality. I tolerate unreasonable religious sentiment when it is not immoral."²¹ For Gandhi, "there is no religion higher than truth and righteousness."²²

As a result, for Gandhi, morality had a central place in religion. Morality could not be separated from religion, because morality was the essence of religion. When morality was incarnated in an individual it became religion, because it bound, held and sustained him or her in time of trials. When wanting to judge whether a

19. K.L. Seshagiri Rao, *Mahatma Gandhi and comparative Religions*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1990), p. 61

20. Jayantanuja Bandyopadhyaya, *Social and Political Thought of Gandhi*, (London: Allied Publishers, 1969), p. 20

21. *All Men are Brothers*, p. 69

22. *Ibid.*, p. 68

doctrine was religious or irreligious Gandhi's criterion was morality. Gandhi rejected any doctrine that was in conflict with reason and morality. A person who violated moral laws could not be called religious. One, who had a good, moral life, was truly religious no matter what one's faith was. Since Gandhi gave more emphasis on the role of morality to explain his religious concept, his religion would be classified as an 'ethical religion'. A person who considered himself or herself religious should conform to morality in thought, word, and deed. If one's life is divorced from morality that person cannot claim God is on his or her side. Gandhi wrote,

As soon as we lose the moral basis, we cease to be religious. There is no such thing as religion overriding morality. Man for instance cannot be untruthful, cruel and incontinent and claim to have God on his side.²³

In Gandhi's view, morality was not a matter of external conformity but rather inward fulfillment accomplished by right action. Human selfish desire lead to immoral action. On the other hand, for Gandhi saving and serving became the highest moral action. Gandhi wrote,

Our desire and motive may be divided into two classes- selfish and unselfish. All selfish desires are immoral, while the desire to improve ourselves for the sake of doing good to others is truly moral. The highest moral law is that we should unremittingly work for the good of mankind.²⁴

Gandhi practiced in his own life five cardinal virtues: *Ahimsa* (non-violence), *Satya* (Truth), *Brahmacharya* (Continence), *Asteyagraha* (Non-stealing), and *Aparigraha* (Non-possession). All Indian philosophical systems have accepted each of these beliefs as cardinal virtues. The practice of these virtues is common to all people. But in Gandhi's *Sabarmati Ashram* everyone vowed to practice these five virtues (and some other disciplines) which Gandhi explained, were helpful for building up the moral and spiritual personality. Moral, social, economic and political values are integrally connected in these vows. Gandhi laid down these vows not as a sign of weakness but as a way of entering more deeply into the truth.²⁵

23. *The Message of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 40

24. *All Men are Brothers*, p, 69

25. *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, p. 219

G. Religion and Politics

Gandhi was not a political philosopher. His political thoughts and ideas were not developed and systematized. Some of Gandhi's critics find his mixing of religion and politics irrational. It is an undeniable fact that Gandhi was a spiritual man, who was at the same time deeply involved in world politics. His admirers say that Gandhi was a saint in his personal life; as well, he was one of the greatest political activists and reformers of all time.²⁶ In spite of what his critics say, Gandhi clearly stated that all his activities, including politics, were derived from his religious faith and conviction. He was involved in politics because of his religion. Gandhi wrote,

I could not live for a single second without religion. Many of my political friends despair of me because they say that even my politics are derived from religion. And they are right. My politics and all other activities of mine are derived from my religion. I go further and say that every activity of a man of religion must be derived from his religion, because religion means being bound to God, that is to say God rules your every breath.²⁷

People usually separate religion from politics. It is very rare to find persons who are deeply political and spiritual at the same time. But for Gandhi that was just how it was. His involvement with politics was precisely because of his religion. Since religion was central to his life, it followed that his political service for the common good of the people flowed from his spiritual values. He held that for one to consistently love and serve people, one's life had to be influenced by spiritual values.

In Gandhi's view, human life is an integral whole; no one can draw a clear distinction between religion and politics. Religion is not just one aspect of human life; rather religion influences all aspects and activities of man's life. To be religious means to be actively involved in politics. According to Gandhi neither the human mind nor human society is divided into watertight compartments of social, political and religious orders. Rather, all act and react upon one another.²⁸

26. *Social and Political Thought of Gandhi*, p.16

27. *Harijan*, March 21, 1934

28. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 101

According to Gandhi, politics without moral and religious principles is absolute dirt. Gandhi applied his two moral and religious principles, *Ahimsa* and *Satya*, to politics. The aim of his politics was the welfare of the nation; which he claimed, should also be the concern of a man of religion. This is why Gandhi was proud to say,

I cannot isolate politics from the deepest things of my life, for the simple reason that my politics are not corrupt, they are inextricably bound up with non-violence and truth."²⁹

H. Religious Education

According to Gandhi, man is created with both body and soul. The aim of education is not merely intellectual training in Gandhi's view. Rather, the primary aim of education is character building and promoting purity in personal life. Education has to be the balanced and harmonious development of one's body, mind and heart. As he wrote,

Man is neither mere intellect, or the gross animal body, nor the heart or soul alone. A proper and harmonious combination of all three is required for the making of the whole man and constitutes the true economics of education.³⁰

In Gandhi's view, harmonious and balanced education is incomplete without religious education. Religious education, therefore, is compulsory, but instructions are given on fundamental ethics, which are common to all religions. Religious education should not be given only in theory; teachers are to model religious faith and conviction. Thus, students will learn from the living example of their teachers. Gandhi wrote, "Religious education is indispensable and the child should get it by watching the teacher's conduct and by hearing him talk about it."³¹

Gandhi realized it would be difficult to implement religious education in India, for there were many religious denominations each competing for adherents. However, he did not think it was impossible. According to him, the curriculum for religious education should include a study of religious faiths other than one's own.

29. *Ibid.*, p.102

30. *Ibid.*, p. 379

31. Mahatma Gandhi, *True Education*, (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1962), p. 127

This would help students cultivate the habit of understanding and appreciating the religious faith of others in the spirit of reverence and broadminded tolerance. Parents at home would impart the instruction on denominational religions. If members of any particular religion wanted denominational instruction at school, it should be arranged and provided, at the expense of that particular denomination.

For Gandhi, practice of religion meant searching for Truth, following Ahimsa as the means. For him, the aim of education is character building, which is accomplished through the art of living life based on Truth and Ahimsa. Therefore, true religious education should include the two universal virtues of Truth and Ahimsa. The best way to teach these virtues to students is in the witness of these virtues actually lived by the students' teachers. Gandhi wrote,

To me religion means Truth and *ahimsa* or rather Truth alone, because Truth includes *ahimsa*, *ahimsa* being the necessary and indispensable means for its discovery. Therefore, anything that promotes the practice of these virtues is a means for imparting religious education and the best way to do this, in my opinion, is for the teachers rigorously to practice these virtues in their own person. Their very association with the boys whether on the playground or in the classroom, will then give the pupils a fine training in these fundamental virtues.³²

In Gandhi's view, study of religion was not merely a theoretical or academic concern. The religious education Gandhi advocated was not focused on religious doctrine but on a new method based on a philosophy of life. A philosophy for which he lived and ultimately offered his life. Gandhi expected this religious education to help students build their character, respecting the dignity of every human life and create a balanced, harmonious and just social order based on Truth and love. This religious education would uphold the moral and spiritual dimensions of human life.

I. View of God and Reality

Gandhi was born into an orthodox Hindu *Vaisnava* family. The religious environment of his family helped firm up Gandhi's faith and conviction in God. He believed in a God who controls and

32. *Young India*, December 6, 1928

guides the universe, a God who is near to us and resides within us. Gandhi denied giving any rational proof of God's existence saying, "there are numerous phenomena from which you can reason out the existence of God; but I shall not insult your intelligence by offering you rational explanations." He rather drew proof of God's existence from simple personal experience. He said, "If I exist, God exists. With me it is a necessity of my being as it is with millions."³³

According to Gandhi there are two stages of knowledge of God. The first stage is faith and the other stage is the first-hand experience of God to which faith leads. Since God is beyond reason, no rational explanation can be enough to prove the existence of God. Gandhi did not deny the importance of human reason. He understood it to be a useful instrument of knowledge on one level. However, he believed if one remained only on the rational level, one is likely to miss the level of true spiritual knowledge. God is not an object of knowledge; He Himself is the knower. For this reason God is above reason.

Gandhi did not describe God as a person. Rather, his description of God was one of Force, as Light, as Love, as the Idea, as the Essence of Life, as Pure and Undeified Consciousness, and as the Atheism of the Atheist. For Gandhi, God was not only near us, but God was within us. As Law and Law-Giver, God, living within us, rules our lives. Of this he wrote,

I do not regard God as a person. Truth for me is God, and God's Law and God are not different things or facts, in the sense that an earthly king and his law are different. Because God is an Idea, Law Himself. Therefore, it is impossible to conceive God as breaking the Law. He, therefore, does not rule our actions and withdraws Himself. When we say He rules our actions, we are simply using human language and we try to limit Him. Otherwise He and His Law abide everywhere and govern everything.³⁴

Although Gandhi preferred to worship God as the formless, nameless Absolute, he recognized there were those who needed to feel and experience God as personal, to feel God's presence and to experience God's personal touch.

33 *Mahatma Gandhi and Comparative Religion*, p. 68

34 *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 70-71

Hinduism believes that God speaks through super-men, possibly many, who are the incarnations of God Himself. Gandhi himself was regarded as the incarnation of the god Vishnu.³⁵ These super-men appear to the world whenever *Dharma* flourishes, declines or needs protecting. Hinduism does not, however, recognize incarnation of an exclusive, unique, single person or prophet.³⁶ Gandhi had a similar concept of incarnation. For Gandhi, all embodied life in reality is the incarnation of God. A person possessing divine qualities and realizing self, through proper practice of religion, can be paid homage because that person does not reduce the greatness of God. Gandhi explains,

All embodied life is in reality an incarnation of God, but it is not usual to consider every living being an incarnation. Future generations pay this homage to one who, in his own generation, has been extraordinarily religious in his conduct. I can see nothing wrong in this procedure; it takes nothing from God's greatness, and there is no violence done to Truth...³⁷

J. God as Truth

Gandhi described the Being of God as Truth. In Indian philosophy there is only one Reality, one Being that is God. Only God is; nothing else exists. As a typical Hindu, Gandhi described God in many different ways, but deep down in his heart, he experienced God as Truth, because God is the only True, Ultimate and Changeless Reality. Gandhi wrote,

I would say with those who say, "God is Love," God is Love. But deep down I used to say that though God may be love, God is Truth above all. If it is possible for the human tongue to give the fullest description of God, I have come to the conclusion that God is Truth. Two years ago I went a step further and said that Truth is God.³⁸

One might wonder why Gandhi said Truth is God rather than God is Truth. Truth is the one and the only essential property of God for Gandhi. When we say, "God is Truth", we describe only one property

35 Jesudasan, S.J., *A Gandhian Theology of Liberation*, (Gujarar: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1987), p. 215

36 Dr. Basu Durga Das, *The Essence of Hinduism*, (New Delhi: Prentice-Hall of India, 1990), p. 1

37 *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 76

38 *Ibid.*, p.51

of God, setting up no priorities among the properties of God. We thus give only a partial description of God. But when we say, "Truth is God", the identification of God with Truth becomes complete. Truth is no longer a partial description of God, one of many properties of God; Truth becomes the complete definition, the essence of God. Truth and God become convertible terms. Gandhi wrote,

The word "*Satya*" (Truth) is derived from "Sat" which means being. And nothing is or exists in reality except Truth. That is why "Sat" or Truth is perhaps the most important name of God. In fact it is more correct to say that Truth is God than to say God is Truth. But as we cannot do without a ruler or a general, names of God such as King of Kings or the Almighty are and will remain more usually current. On deeper thinking, however, it will be realised that 'Sat' or "*Satya*" is the only correct and fully significant name of God.³⁹

In view of this passage, we can say that Gandhi recognized the alternative names for God, but deep down in his heart he believed the best name for God was Truth.

There were many reasons why, for Gandhi, Truth was the best name for God. First, diverse believers, even nonbelievers, could be united in this name. Even people who did not believe in God's existence could understand God's essence through their firm faith in the reality of Truth. Atheists and skeptics, while not believing in the existence of God, still searched for Truth. Because of their search for Truth, Gandhi could not consider them as true atheists. He saw them as God-fearing, since Truth is God and they were truth-fearing.

Second, Gandhi believed that through the narrowing of the concept of God, a group of believers could begin to see their God as superior to another group's named God. This could lead believers to indulge in vicious name-calling, with others being named nonbelievers, atheists and Kafirs. Heinous crimes, atrocities and fanatical, irreligious behavior of believers of one religion against believers of another religion were but escalated manifestations of a narrowed concept of God. Replacing the word 'God' with 'Truth', naming Truth as God, people could have different concepts of God but could be tolerant of each other. All religious people could be united and cooperate with one another in the name of Truth.

39 Ronald Duncan, (ed), *Selected Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, (London: Faber & Faber), p. 46

K. View of Conversion

1. Meaning of Conversion

According to the Samsad English Dictionary, “conversion” means change from evil ways to goodliness. It also means to change from one religion to another. Generally, both meanings are used in the major religions of the world. Christianity looks at conversion as part of its mission in the world, for Christ commanded, “Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded” (Mt. 28: 19-20). This is why Christianity is a missionary religion. Believers, through their preaching and teaching, bring people to faith in Jesus. Likewise, Islam is a missionary religion. Through Islamic teachings the non-believer is brought to the faith in Hazrat Muhammed, the prophet of God.

Traditionally the Hindu religion is not a missionary religion in the sense of conversion (changing religion). Hinduism is open to all religions, for all religions search for truth. It believes that God reveals His truth through all religions, not exclusively through a single religion or prophet. This is why Hindus tend to be more tolerant and respectful toward other faiths and do not try to convert others to Hinduism. At the end of the nineteenth century, however, Christianity’s missionary spirit and idea of conversion started to influence Hinduism. Many Hindu reform movements subsequently began, as did the development of a Hindu concept of conversion.⁴⁰

2. Conversion as Changing Religion

It is evident from Gandhi’s view of religion that the thought of conversion, as understood as the need to change from one religion to another, was irrelevant. There was no need for one to change religion since God revealed all religions; and all religions, though imperfect in our human understanding, were means to attain the same goal, God. Gandhi’s view of religion called one to respect and accept truth from other religions, rather than convert in the classical sense. In his view, people were to help one another to live according to the truth and values found in their own religion. Gandhi wrote,

40 *Hinduism: World Religions*, p.118

Every religion is as precious to me as my own Hinduism ... No thought of conversion is permissible to me at all. We must help a Hindu to become a better Hindu, a Mussalman to become a better Mussalman and a Christian to become a better Christian ... We must eradicate from our midst the secret pride that our religion is more true and that another's is less so. Our attitude towards all other religions must be absolutely clear and sincere. Our prayer for others should never be, "Oh God, give him the light which Thou hast given me," but "Give him all the light and truth that he needs for his highest attainment."... Should some persons think of changing their religious label (converting themselves), I cannot hinder their freedom of action, but I will be sorry to see them act thus.⁴¹

3. Conversion as Changing Heart

Gandhi's sense of conversion was interior. For him conversion was the process wherein we become our real selves. Through ignorance and selfish desire we have lost our real selves. Though God is within us, we have a need to purify ourselves, changing our hearts, so as to discover our real selves. This conversion takes place in and through the living of our lives according to the truth and values of our particular religion. This self-purification and changing of heart is a lifelong process in which we give up our old ways in order to be renewed. Gandhi insisted,

Conversion must not mean denationalization. Conversion should mean a definite giving up of the evil of the old, adoption of all the good of the new and a scrupulous avoidance of everything evil in the new. Conversion, therefore, should mean a life of great dedication to one's own country, greater surrender to God, greater self-purification.⁴²

Mr. Polak, a friend of Gandhi, once asked Gandhi if he believed in conversion, in changing from one faith to another. Gandhi answered him saying, "If a man reaches the heart of his own religion, he has reached the heart of the other, too. There is only one God, but there are many paths to Him".⁴³

41 *Harijan*, Feb. 22, 1942

42. *Young India*, August 20, 1925

43. Ellsberg Robert (Ed), *Gandhi On Christianity*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), p.12

From the above statements, it is evident that Gandhi understood conversion as the constant giving up of our old sinful ways of life and the subsequent living of the faith and values of our own unique religion. Surrender to God, self-purification to realize the God within and dedication to the service of the nation are the aims of conversion.

When conversion takes place in one's heart, potentially one becomes a better religious person and learns to better respect other religions as well. But if there is pride in the heart, there is a tendency to claim that one religion is better than others and the question of conversion as conflict arises. That is why Gandhi tells us to eradicate that pride from the heart so that our attitude toward other religions may be sincere. However, if any one, using his total freedom, wants to change religion, one may do so. Gandhi would feel sorry for that person, however. About the aim of conversion Gandhi wrote,

Another important aspect of Gandhi's view on conversion is that conversion is and always should be toward God, not from one religion to the other. This is because religions are not ends in themselves. Religions are different roads leading to the same end, which is God.

L. View of Liberation

1. Meaning of Liberation in Hindu Tradition

The Sanskrit word for Liberation is "*moksha*". In Hindu tradition *moksha* is one of the four basic human aims. The word is derived from the root "muc," meaning "to release," "to free." The literal meaning of *moksha* is emancipation, complete freedom.⁴⁵ In order to understand the concept of *moksha*, we need to know two other Hindu concepts, *Karma* and *Samsara*. Originally *Karma* meant any correct activity or properly performed ritual. But later in the *Upanishadic* period, the religious philosophers expanded it to mean that one's present actions determine one's future life. This expanded meaning became the law of *Karma*:—one's thoughts, words and deeds fix one's lot in future existence. Therefore, everything a person does determines his or her destiny. The power lies within the self to determine what the future will be; people build their own future. A person becomes good

45. *Oriental Philosophies*, p. 45

through his good actions and bad through his bad actions. From this law of *Karma* the concept of the cycles of life, death, rebirth, and redeath was reinforced. These cycles were called *Samsara*.

The aim of all human beings is one and the same, to gain *moksha*: liberation from the conditional and temporary existence of the world and union with the Ultimate Reality. *Moksha* is a religious state for which all Hindus strive. One day or another, everyone is sure to reach the goal.⁴⁶ *Moksha* cannot be gained by actions aimed at gaining something in this world. Rather, the person who wants salvation must seek to experience oneness with the Ultimate Reality.

How does a man find oneness with the Ultimate? Hinduism discovered four basic paths that lead man to realize God. They are the path of knowledge (*Jnana*), the path of selfless action (*Karma*), the path of devotion (*Bhakti*) and the path of Meditation (*Raja-Yoga*). The goal of all four paths is the same, to realize the identity of one's self with the Universal Self; which is *moksha* or liberation.

2. Gandhi's Approach to Liberation

In the philosophy of Gandhi the idea of *moksha* or liberation played an important role. If we analyze his life and work, we see Gandhi following the path of *karma*. He gave highest importance to the service of God through the service of humanity. Some think Gandhi gave more importance to *Dharma* than to liberation (*moksha*). He followed *Dharma* in order to gain *moksha* or liberation. *Dharma* means the social duties and responsibilities of every Hindu. Without *Dharma* there would be disorder in social life. Without *Dharma* there is no liberation. For this reason Gandhi never treated these two, *Dharma* and *moksha*, separately. He followed *Dharma* in order to gain *moksha* or liberation.

3. Liberation as Self-Realization

As we have said previously, the aim of the Hindu religion is self-realization; which is liberation. This is also true for Gandhi. The goal of his life was to achieve liberation, to realize his self. Self-realization means to realize one's self as one with the Ultimate Self, which is God. It means to see God within us and also within others.

46 *The Essence of Hinduism*, p.114

All Gandhi's activities, whether political, social or religious, were directed to this goal. He often made this clear,

What I want to achieve, - what I have been striving and pining to achieve...- is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain *moksha*. I live and move and have my being in pursuit of this goal. All that I do by way of speaking and writing and all my ventures in the political field are directed to this same end."⁴⁷

4. Liberation as Self-Purification

Self-purification is a very important concept in Gandhi's religious philosophy. In Gandhi's understanding, a person must purify himself so that he can realize God and himself. Both Jainism and Christianity greatly influenced Gandhi in developing this concept of self-purification. While believing in the liberation from the body through ascetic practices, Jainism also sees the body as temple of the soul. Gandhi used the Christian concept when he explained the body as the "temple of the Holy Ghost". For Gandhi our body is God's gift and we have to take care of it, as we have to discipline it. We cannot satisfy every desire of our body. If our body controls us, we become slaves of our body. Here the Jain influence persists, with Gandhi giving importance to self-purification through penance, in order to gain liberation. Gandhi wrote,

Moksha is liberation from impure thought. Complete extinction of impure thought is impossible without ceaseless penance. There is only one way to achieve this. The moment an impure thought arises, confront it with a pure one. This is possible only with God's grace, and God's grace comes throughout ceaseless communion with Him and complete self-surrender.⁴⁸

5. Liberation as Self-Surrender to God

According to Hindu belief, man has to work for his own liberation. In Gandhi's view the work of liberation did not depend on man only; it also depended on God's grace. Man had to surrender himself completely to God in order for God's will and plan to be fulfilled in man's life. Gandhi's prayer and fasting were two means of

47 *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 54

48 *Harijan*, Feb. 22, 1942, p. 47

surrendering himself to God. Prayer was the source of power to fulfill God's intention and plan in Gandhi's life. Through fasting Gandhi purified his heart in order to be the instrument of God. Gandhi wrote,

Man is supposed to be the maker of his own destiny. It is partly true. He can make his destiny only in so far as he is allowed by the Great Power who overrides all our intentions, all our plans and carries out His own plans.⁴⁹

6. Service as Means of Liberation

According to Hinduism, renunciation is essential for liberation, because renunciation alone can bring liberation.⁵⁰ All the branches of Hindu religion teach the principle that without giving up worldly attachment there is no salvation. From this follows the teaching of the law of *Karma* that one has not to abandon all activity, but rather the desire for the fruits of the work, so that work itself may not constitute any bondage. Gandhi as *karma*-Yogi also stressed selfless service. The *Gita* played an important role in this life of his, particularly in building up his philosophy of service. The *Gita* taught him to give selfless service to humanity without expecting to receive any of the fruits. He looked at service as the means to attain salvation. Gandhi wrote, "For me the road to salvation lies through incessant toil in the service of my country and there through of humanity. I want to identify myself with everything that lives."⁵¹ During the last days of Gandhi's life some of his friends asked him to explain what he really meant by *moksha*. He replied:

The desire for *moksha* was indeed there, but it was not meant for anyone other than the individual himself. The world was interested in the fruits, not the root. For the tree itself, however, the chief concern should be not the fruit, but the root. It was in the depth of one's own being that the individual had to concentrate. He had to nurse it with the water of his labour and suffering. The root was his chief concern.⁵²

It is clear that the goal of his life was salvation. However, he saw salvation as a fruit with the root being God. As a result, Gandhi had

49. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 463

50. *The Essence of Hinduism*, p. 81

51. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi* p. 7

52. *Harijan*, Sept. 28, 1947, p. 340

more concern for *dharma* than *moksha*. Faithfully following *dharma*, Gandhi sought God within himself and also in every living being, offering his selfless service and leaving *moksha* in the hand of the Giver.

Gandhi strongly believed that liberation of an individual depends on ceaseless service given to the poor and lowly. He found God in humanity rather than in the Himalayan caves. He believed that it is useless to search for Him outside of humanity. He wrote, "Hence my passion for the service of the depressed classes. And as I cannot render service without entering politics, I find myself in them."⁵³ He added, "And so doing in all humanity I hope some day to see God-Truth- face to face."⁵⁴

7. Liberation through *Swaraj*

The word *Swaraj* is a sacred *Vedic* word which means self-rule. Gandhi's movement of *Swaraj* was also a means for liberation. It did not recognize any race or religious distinctions, but was felt by all-men, women and children. Its aims were not only political and economical independence, but also moral and social in nature. Political and economic freedom could not be attained without faith in God. A man of faith had to perform his moral and social duties, not as a slave, but as a free person. Gandhi put forth four important principles for *Swaraj*:

- a. It should be done in self-rule or self-control.
- b. It means is soul-force or love force.
- c. In order to exert this force one has to be indigenous (*Swadesi*) in every way.
- d. What we want should be done in the sense of duty.

Gandhi put the aim of *Swaraj* in the following words,

...What we mean and want through Poorna *Swaraj* ... is an awakening among the masses, a knowledge among them of their true interest and ability to serve that interest against the whole world,...harmony, freedom from aggression from within or without, and a progressive improvement in the economic condition of the masses...⁵⁵

53. *Young India*, Sept. 11 1924, p. 288

54. *Ibid.*, December 3, 1925, p. 422

55. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p.318

Gandhi rejected the orthodox concept of liberation as a phenomenon residing only in the life to come. For him salvation was not only a future reality but it was also in the present, here and now. Men had (and have) to fulfill necessary conditions to experience liberation. They have to purify themselves and be obedient to the Law. Men experience liberation in the here and now through their daily struggles for truth, justice, peace and harmony. Gandhi made this clear when he said, "God did not bear the cross only 1990 years ago, but He bears it today, and He dies and is resurrected from day to day".⁵⁶

8. Spinning Wheel as Symbol of Liberation

For Gandhi, the *Charkha* or the Spinning Wheel had not only instrumental value but it had deep symbolic meaning as well. He used the Spinning Wheel as a symbol of spiritual, social and economical liberation. Therefore, spinning on the wheel became an activity of daily living wherein love and non-violence were practiced. Gandhi truly believed that salvation of an individual depends on selfless service given to the poor and lowly. God dwells among the poor and lowly and the best way to worship God is to serve them with full dedication. In using the spinning wheel, one is truly dedicating oneself to God in the spirit of service to the masses. For Gandhi prayer and service went hand in hand. That is why the spinning wheel became part of his ashram prayer. In the ashram he encouraged everyone to spin for half an hour as a sign of sacrifice for the nation.

The Spinning-wheel has become a part and parcel of the Ashram prayer. The conception of spinning as sacrifice has been linked with the idea of God, the reason being that we believe that in the *Charkha* and what it stands for lays the only hope of salvation of the poor.⁵⁷

Gandhi's philosophy of the spinning wheel has to be understood from the perspective of the economy of Indian villages. The majority of the people of the villages were uneducated and lived in poverty. For Gandhi, revival of the spinning wheel was part and parcel of the revival of the village economy, it was and was to become the pivotal point of village industries counteracting the impact of modern textiles, capitalism, and empire. If the spinning wheel did not ply in the villages of India, other industries could not flourish. In Gandhi's

56. *Gandhi on Christianity*, p. 96

57. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 405

words, the *charkha* is the sun while the other village industries revolve around it. If the sun should become extinct, the planets cannot go on, for they depend on the sun.⁵⁸

He further added, "If India's villages are to live and prosper, the *charkha* must become universal."⁵⁹ The spinning wheel for Gandhi was, thus, the symbol of economic and spiritual liberation. One spun in the spirit of service rendered to God through the service to the poor and lowly.

Gilbert Murray, one of Gandhi's admirers, was impressed by Gandhi's religious practices, faith and conviction, and wrote as early as 1914, "Be careful dealing with a man who cares nothing for sensual pleasure, nothing for comfort or praise, or promotion, but is simply determined to do what he believes is right."⁶⁰

It is clear from the above discussion that Gandhi's religion is not only for Hindus, nor merely for India, but is for all human beings. It includes the best and essential aspects of all religions. The aim of his religious philosophy is to reeducate the human race; no one is to be excluded.

II. GANDHI'S VIEW ON OTHER RELIGIONS

As a great religious leader and a Truth seeker, Mahatma Gandhi recognized all religions of the world as true and divine. In the course of his experiment with Truth, Gandhi showed a constructive and enlightened approach to the study of all major religions. It is important to see how he viewed and interacted with the four major world religions: namely, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam.

A. Gandhi's View on Hinduism

Gandhi was a *Sanatani* Hindu, but his love and faith in Hinduism was not blind. According to him Hinduism was the most tolerant and

58. *Mahatma Gandhi Multimedia e-book*, (New Delhi: Publication Division 1999).

Gandhi said this while he was addressing at Bihar Vidyapith, Patna on January 30, 1927.

59. *Ibid.*

60. Louis Fisher, *Gandhi: His Life and Message for the World*, (New York: New American Library. 1954), p. 49. This was quoted in Louis Fischer from the tribute given to Gandhi by Gilbert Murray in 1914.

liberal religion. He was deeply impressed by the spiritual and ethical teaching of Hinduism. Gandhi loved and appreciated his own religion. His love for Hinduism came from his deep study of Hindu scriptures. The more he studied his own religion, the broader his mind became and the more he learned to appreciate other religions. He was truly a Hindu deep in his heart. Gandhi wrote,

The deeper I study Hinduism the stronger becomes the belief in me that Hinduism is as broad as the Universe and it takes in its fold all that is good in this world. And so I find that with Mussalmans I can appreciate the beauties of Islam and sing its praises. And so simultaneously with the professors of other religions, and still something within me tells me that, for all that deep veneration I show to these several religions, I am all the more a Hindu, none the less for it.⁶¹

Gandhi is known as a great social and religious reformer. His perception of Hinduism was something more than historical Hinduism. Emphasizing everything with Truth, Gandhi gave a new spirit to Hinduism. He was open to accept the truth and beauty wherever he found them. He harmonized truth with the eternal *Dharma*. In his writings Gandhi pointed out the glorious aspects of Hinduism. At the same time, he criticized the inconsistencies of Sanatana Hindu *Dharma*. He wrote,

I can no more describe my feelings for Hinduism than for my own wife. She moves me as no other women in the world can. Not that she has no faults; I dare say she has many more than I see myself. But the feeling of an indescribable bond is there. Even so I feel for and about Hinduism with all its faults and limitations.⁶²

Gandhi made it very clear that he was a Santana Hindu because he believed in: 1. the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas, 2. Varnasrama *dharma* - strictly in the Vedic sense, 3. Cow protection in a much larger sense than the popular one, and 4. He believed in

61. Roger Eastman (ed), *The ways of Religion: An introduction to the major tradition*, 2nd edition, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 33

A section of Gandhi's writing is printed here under the title "I am but a seeker after Truth."

62. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 92

idol worship.⁶³ More importantly he said that he was an orthodox Hindu, in the sense of the author of the Mahabharata, who gave greater importance to Truth. Gandhi wrote,

And if the Mahabharata may be accepted as the fifth Veda, then I claim to be an orthodox Hindu because every moment of the twenty-four hours of my life, I am endeavoring to follow truth, counting no cost too great.⁶⁴

According to Gandhi the best traits of Hinduism are the following:

1. Universal Tolerance and Inclusiveness

We have seen earlier that Hinduism is comprised of many cultures, traditions, beliefs, practices and philosophies. It accepts the fundamental teaching of all religions as part of universal *dharma*. Each religion has its own value and serves society in accordance with its teaching and traditions. This pluralism is healthy and it would be harmful for society to reduce all religions into one particular religion. For this reason, modern Indian thinkers perceive Hinduism as a universal religion that teaches each one to worship according to his or her faith in order to obtain *moksha* or liberation. Gandhi wrote,

Hinduism is not an exclusive religion. In it there is room for the worship of all the prophets in the world. It is not a missionary religion in the ordinary sense of the term. It has no doubt absorbed many tribes in its fold, but this absorption has been of an evolutionary, imperceptible character. Hinduism tells everyone to worship God according to his own faith or *Dharma* and so it lives at peace with all the religions.⁶⁵

Gandhi perceived Hinduism as universally tolerant and inclusive. He echoed the views of Swami Vivekananda with his belief in Hinduism as a religion of universal tolerance, which accepted all religions as true. He wrote, "We must not only be tolerant to others, but positively embrace them, and that truth is the basis of all religions."⁶⁶

63. *Young India*, Oct.6, 1921

64. *Ibid.*, December 15, 1927

65. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 92

66. Swami Lokeshwarananda, (ed), *Swami Vivekananda: His Life and Message*, (Calcutta: The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1994), p. 30

2. Truth and Non-Violence

Sir S. Radhakrishnan once asked Gandhi to answer three questions: 1. What is your religion? 2. How are you led to it? 3. What is its bearing on social life? Gandhi without any hesitation answered the first question saying, "My religion is Hinduism which, for me, is the religion of humanity and includes the best of all the religions known to me."⁶⁷ He answered the second question saying, "I am being led to my religion through Truth and Non-violence, i.e. love in the broadest sense."⁶⁸ Regarding the third question Gandhi said, "The bearing of this religion on social life is, or has to be, seen in one's daily social contact. To be true to such religion one has to lose oneself in continuous and continuing service of all life."⁶⁹ Gandhi's response to Sir S. Radhakrishnan clearly spelled out how Truth and non-violence, the core values of Hinduism, shaped his philosophy of life.

All the religions preach truth and non-violence, but according to Gandhi it has found highest expression and application in Hinduism.⁷⁰ Of course, Gandhi perceived Buddhism and Jainism as branches of Hinduism. For Gandhi, Hinduism was the glorious religion because it was devoted to truth and non-violence. While he had love for Hinduism, he held that others may have the same love for their own religion,

Hinduism with the message of *Ahimsa* is to me the most glorious religion in the world- as my wife to me is the most beautiful woman in the world- but others may feel the same about their own.⁷¹

3. Respect of All Life

All religions of the world teach respect for human life; but Hinduism goes one step further. It teaches to love and respect all life as well. For this reason, many Hindus practice vegetarianism. For Hindus life is sacred and belongs to God. In this regard Gandhi said, "This unity of all life is a peculiarity of Hinduism which confines salvation not

67. *The ways of Religion: An introduction to the Major tradition*, p. 52

68. *Ibid.*, p. 53

69. *Ibid.*, p. 53

70. *Harijan*, Jan. 30, 1937

71. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 93

to human beings alone but says that it is possible for all God's creatures."⁷²

Man is not the master of creation but the servant of God's creatures. Man cannot exploit other lives for his own purposes. That is why Hinduism excludes all types of exploitation. Man is led to God through the love of all living beings. The *Bhagavad-Gita* teaches, "When one sees Me everywhere and everything in Me, I am never lost to him and he is never lost to Me." (Gita. VI. 30). All animals have the right to live, like the human being. According to Gandhi, Cow protection is the gift of Hinduism to the world; it is a distinctive contribution to the world's religious ideas. For him "Cow" is an entire subhuman world. In it is meant the weak and the helpless.⁷³

4. Spirit of Renunciation

Renunciation is one of the most important concepts of Hindu philosophy and religious practice. Hinduism teaches that a life of wealth and luxury often does not bring out what is best in man. All the Yogas, especially *karma* yogas, teach this fundamental principle of renunciation. According to this principle, disenchantment from the fruits of action is essential for *muksa* for self-realization. This renunciation is noble when it is done in the spirit of service of humanity. The *Gita* teaches that true renunciation is not to abandon the world and society but to abandon ego-centered actions. Selfless action is the best way to realize God and to receive liberation. Inspired by the teaching of *Gita*, Gandhi dedicated his life to the service of humanity. He wrote from his experience,

The secret of happy life lies in renunciation. Renunciation is life. Indulgence spells death. Therefore, everyone has right and should desire to live 125 years while performing service without an eye on result.⁷⁴

Human life finds its meaning and purpose in selfless service to humanity. True service is impossible without renunciation or attachment to the fruits, and perfect renunciation is impossible without perfect observation of *ahimsa* in every shape and form.

72. *Harijan*, December 26, 1936; See also K.L. Seshagiri Rao, op.cit., Hinduism, 19.

73. *Young India*, June 8, 1921

74. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 192

According to Gandhi shortcomings of Hinduism are as follows:

a. Caste System

According to *Mahabharata* and *Dharmasatras*, *Varnashrama Dharma* is one of the four social duties of every Hindu. In the *varnashrama dharma*, social duties are divided into four divisions in the ancient Hindu society: *Brahmins* (priestly class), *Kshatriyas* (the fighting and governing class, *Vaisyas* (the trading and agricultural people and the *Sudras* (the servant class). This *varnashrama Dharma* defines man's mission in the society, and brings moral order in the society. Gandhi did not believe in the caste system as it was practiced in the Hindu society, but he had strong faith in *varnashrama Dharma*. He strongly believed in the four *varnas* and approved of it on the basis of the division of labor or duties in the society, but not on the basis of birth. Gandhi said,

Varnashrama dharma, the four divisions of society, each complementary of the other and none inferior or superior to any other, each as necessary for the whole body of Hinduism as any other.⁷⁵

According to Gandhi, Untouchability and the caste system had no place in *varnashrama Dharma*, as there is no prohibition against inter-marriage and inter-dining. It is up to the individual to choose whom to marry and/or with whom to dine.⁷⁶ The caste system as it was practiced was an obstacle to social and economic progress, causing an arrogant assumption of superiority by one group over another, which Gandhi considered as sin against God and man.⁷⁷ When the caste system goes away, *Varnashrama dharma* will take its place and Hinduism will be purified.

b. Untouchability:

Untouchability is a concept that considers a person or a group of persons as untouchable, abominable, or being less than human. It is based on ancient prejudices. Gandhi considered untouchability as the 'plague' of Hindu society, for it gave others a bad impression of Hinduism. Also, he saw its practices of violating human rights and

75. *Ibid.*, p. 108

76. *Ibid.*, p. 110

77. *Ibid.*, p. 110

dignity as inhuman. He called the untouchable, *Harijan*, meaning 'the people of God'. There was a living passion in Gandhi to remove untouchability from Hindu society. He reiterated, "What I want, what I am living for, and what I should delight in dying for, is the eradication of untouchability root and branch."⁷⁸ All through his life he fought against it and made removal of it one of the main Planks of his constructive program. He knew very well the removal of the evil practice of untouchability from the Hindu society would not be an easy task, for it was deeply rooted in the society and buttressed by religious tradition. He wrote,

In battling against untouchability and in dedicating myself to that battle, I have no less an ambition than to see a complete regeneration of humanity. It may be a mere dream, as unreal as the silver in the sea-shell. It is not so to me while the dream lasts, and in the words of Romain Rolland, "Victory lies not in realization of the goal, but in a relentless pursuit after it."⁷⁹

Gandhi believed in the absolute equality of man, this equality was of souls and not bodies. For this reason, equality is a mental state. In Gandhi's view, if a person considers himself or herself superior to another person, that person sins against God and man. Untouchability makes distinctions among men and women according to status and this is an evil. It creates immense suffering for people as it creates division, isolation and separation among men and women. Gandhi was so sincere in his effort for the removal of untouchability that he was ready to be born again, if need be, as one of the untouchables to share their suffering and sorrow and eradicate it from the society. He wrote,

I do not want to be reborn. But if I have to be born, I should be born an untouchable, so that I may share their sorrows, sufferings, and the affronts leveled at them, in order that I may endeavour to free myself and them from that miserable condition. I, therefore, prayed that, if I should be born again, I should do so not as a Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya or Shudra, but as an Atishudra.⁸⁰

Gandhi strongly believed that removal of untouchability from the society would not be an easy job. He was not after its removal from the society as a

78. *Selected works of Mahatma Gandhi*, (Vol. VI), p. 519

79. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 108

80. *Ibid.*, p. 107

sign of his own successfulness of action. Rather, he was sincere in his dedication to the realization of Truth through the fight against this evil. Quoting the words of Romain Rolland, Gandhi wrote, "Victory lies not in realization of the goal, but in a relentless pursuit after it."⁸¹

c. Animal sacrifice:

Vedic religion prescribed animal sacrifice as an important religious practice. It believes that if the sacrifice is offered correctly, the gods will grant the request of those sacrificing. Though animal sacrifice is prescribed in the Veda, Gandhi was against the idea of animal sacrifice on the grounds that it violated the principle of non-violence. He believed that the True God could not be satisfied through the killing of an innocent animal. In reference to Buddha's teaching on animal sacrifice, Gandhi wrote, "The one thing that the Buddha showed India was that God was not a God who can be appeased by the sacrifice of innocent animals. On the contrary, he held that those who sacrificed animal in the hope of pleasing God were guilty of a double sin."⁸² Instead of animal sacrifice, Gandhi advocated to sacrifice the animality that is in every human person in the form of greed, anger, lust, hatred, ill-will, etc.

B. Gandhi's view on Buddhism

Gandhi's religion is an ethical religion. It is similar to what Buddha taught his disciples: that an ethical life alone can bring human salvation. Lord Buddha's life was dedicated to the search of truth, and non-violence was the means to this search. Gandhi also centered his philosophy of life on these two universal principles. It was *Dharma* that taught Buddha to search for truth using the means of non-violence. Buddha taught his disciples to follow the truth and not to follow him if he manifested inconsistencies in relation to the truth. Buddha's teaching was not exclusive but universal, all embracing and meant for all people. With a great spirit of renunciation, Buddha brought moral order to society, which was previously buried under the formalism and ritualism of *Brahmanism* in India. He not only opposed the caste system but also opposed superiority and inferiority in social order. All aspects of Buddha's teaching made a great

81 *Harijan*, March 25, 1933, p. 3

82 *Young India*, November 24, 1927

impression on Gandhi's life. Gandhi's religious view was also universal, opposed to dogmatism, and abolished all distinction of superiority and inferiority, including the Hindu caste system. It is important to see how Gandhi viewed Buddha, his teaching and the contemporary practice of Buddhism.

1. Buddhism as a Branch of Hinduism

Gandhi considered Buddhism to be a branch of Hinduism. Buddha was born and grew up in a Hindu family. He never gave up Hinduism and never claimed to be a founder of a new religion. However, Buddha was dissatisfied with some aspects of Vedic Hindu religious practice, such as ritualism, animal sacrifice and other ascetic practices. Gandhi considered Buddha to be an extraordinary Hindu reformer; who with his ethical principles, such as self-sacrifice, renunciation and purity of mind, stimulated and uplifted humankind. Gandhi wrote,

It is my deliberate opinion that the essential part of the teaching of the Buddha now forms an integral part of Hinduism. It is impossible for Hindu India today to retrace her steps and go behind the great reformation that Gautama effected in Hinduism. By his immense sacrifice, by his great renunciation, and by the immaculate purity of his life, he left an indelible impress upon Hinduism, and Hinduism owes an eternal debt of gratitude to that great teacher.⁸³

In his book "Mahatma Gandhi and Comparative Religion," K. L. Seshagiri Rao, argues that the relationship between Buddhist scripture and Hindu scripture is similar to the relationship between Christian and Jewish scripture. The Buddha brought a "protestant movement" into Hinduism. That is why Buddhism cannot be completely independent from Hinduism and why Gandhi considered it to be a branch of Hinduism.⁸⁴

Swami Vivekananda shared with Gandhi the view that Buddhism and Hinduism are interrelated and unable to exist independently from each other. He viewed Buddhism as the fulfillment of Hinduism. In Vivekananda's address at the World Parliament of Religions Chicago, 1893, he expressed this view,

83 *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 95

84. *Mahatma Gandhi and Comparative Religion*, p. 21-22

Hinduism cannot live without Buddhism, nor Buddhism without Hinduism. Then realize what the separation has shown to us, that the Buddhists cannot stand without the brain and philosophy of the Brahmins, nor the Brahmin without the heart of the Buddhist. This separation between the Buddhists and the Brahmins is the cause of the downfall of India.⁸⁵

2. The spirit of Buddha and Buddhism

After a careful study of Buddhist scriptures, Gandhi found important inconsistencies between what he understood to be the spirit of Buddha and contemporary Buddhist practices. To Gandhi, the founding of a new religion was inconsistent with the spirit of Buddha. If religion is to be understood as the belief in some supernatural Being, in dogma, and the performance of rituals, then Buddha certainly cannot be considered as founder of a religion. Originally, his was a reform movement, which later became a separate religious tradition. As years passed, many of Buddha's followers reduced his teaching into new dogmas. This caused a split of Buddhism into two branches, Theravada Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism. In the view of Mahayana Buddhism, the earthly Buddha is eternal and divine; who revealed himself in the world for all. These followers glorified Buddha almost as a Divine Being. There are other aspects of Buddhism, which Gandhi found inconsistent with Buddha's spirit, such as the interpretation of God, belief in the nonexistence of soul, and *Nirvana*. In Gandhi's view, Hinduism does not reject the spirit of Buddha. Rather, it rejects aspects of Buddhism, which do not reflect the essential teaching of Buddha. Gandhi made this clear in saying, "What Hinduism did not assimilate from what passes as Buddhism today was not an essential part of Buddha's life and his teaching."⁸⁶

3. Buddha as New Interpreter of Hinduism

Gandhi considered himself a follower of Buddha, for Buddha's teaching and life example are in tune with Hindu tradition. As Buddha never claimed to be the founder of a new religion and never rejected the Hindu religion, Gandhi considered Buddha a true Hindu

85. *Swami Vivekananda: His life and message*, p. 71

86. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p.95

who interpreted Hinduism in a perfect way. The words Buddha utilized in the delivery of his ethical teaching such as *Dharma*, *karma*, *Nirvana*, *moksha*, *atma* and *samsara* were not something new. These words were common to all religious groups in his time. But, in giving a very national, interpretation and unique meaning to these religious terms, Buddha broadened and enlivened the life of Hinduism. Gandhi wrote,

And at the risk of being called a follower of the Buddha, I claim this achievement as a triumph of Hinduism. The Buddha never rejected Hinduism, but he broadened its base. But I want to submit to you that the teaching of the Buddha was not assimilated in its fullness whether it was in Ceylon, or in Burma, or in China, or in Tibet....⁸⁷

Swami Vivekananda shared this understanding with Gandhi. Both saw Buddhism as the fulfillment of Hinduism. For Gandhi and Vivekananda Buddha did not come to teach anything new. But Buddha's own disciples did not understand that he only came to fulfill Hinduism. Vivekananda wrote, "Again, I repeat, Shakya Muni came not to destroy, but he was the fulfillment, the logical conclusion, the logical development of the religion of the Hindus."⁸⁸

4. Buddha's View on God

Basically Buddhism focuses on ethics, psychology and logic, rather than metaphysics. For this reason it is often claimed that Buddha preached atheism and the non-existence of soul. But, according to Gandhi, this view misrepresented the position of Buddha. Buddha wanted to purify Hinduism, which had lost its original spirit and form over the course of history. The cruel rites with which God was worshipped bothered Buddha's conscience. He observed that great damage had been done to the ethical nature of man through a superstitious belief in God. Buddha's ethical philosophy was an attempt to shift the center from the worship of God to the service of man. According to Gandhi, Buddha rejected the notion of God that was distorted by formalistic and ritualistic practices. Buddha rejected the notion of a God likened to earthly kings who are only pleased with cruel rites. Gandhi contended,

87. *Ibid.*, p. 96

88. *Swami Vivekananda: His life and Message*, p. 71

I have heard it contended times without number and I have read it in books also claiming to express the spirit of Buddhism that Buddha did not believe in God. In my humble opinion such a belief contradicts the very central fact of Buddha's teaching. In my humble opinion such a confusion has arisen over his rejection and just rejection of all the base things that passed in his generation under the name of God. He undoubtedly rejected the notion that a being called God could be actuated by malice and could repent His actions, and like the kings of the earth could possibly have favorites.⁸⁹

Buddha did not teach monotheism or polytheism or atheism or even agnosticism. Buddha just was not interested in these profitless metaphysical discussions. His teaching was simple and ethical and served all life. He taught to abstain from evil, to assimilate what is right and good and to purify the mind.

5. Interpretation of Nirvana

Before Buddha's time, *Nirvana* simply meant peace or extinction. However, Buddha gave much deeper meaning and interpretation to it. 'Ni' means 'no' and 'vana' means 'craving'. So, *Nirvana* meant no craving, no attachment or selfishness. When man can get rid of craving, attachment or selfishness he can experience *Nirvana*. Some scholars mistakenly interpreted *Nirvana* negatively as nothingness or total extinction. For this reason they labeled Buddha's teaching as pessimistic. Though negative terms were employed to explain *Nirvana*, in Gandhi's interpretation, *Nirvana* did not in itself project pessimism. Rather, the elimination of craving is a goal of all human beings. Therefore, *Nirvana* is a state of detachment; a state wherein there is no suffering, but the perfect living of happiness and peace. Gandhi interpreted *Nirvana* in the following words,

Nirvana is undoubtedly not utter extinction. So far as I have been able to understand the central fact of the Buddha's life, Nirvana is utter extinction of all that is base in us, all that is vicious in us, all that is corrupt and corruptible in us. Nirvana is not life black, dead space of the grave, but the living peace, the living happiness of a soul which is conscious of itself, and conscious of having found its own abode in the heart of the Eternal.⁹⁰

89. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 96

90. *Ibid.*, p. 96-97

In order to attain *Nirvana* one has to be detached from the world. This detachment produces freedom. Freedom creates stability in the mind, a feeling of peace and understanding of the nature of things in the midst of confusion. Finally, *Nirvana* brings complete liberation from all fetters. *Nirvana*, as Gandhi interpreted it, is the living peace, living happiness and total liberation, which comes out of a self-conscious and proper understanding of the nature of one's soul. Rather than being pessimistic, it is a positive expression.

6. Buddha's contribution

One of the most important contributions Buddha made for the world, according to Gandhi, was his restoration of God to His eternal place. Buddha's philosophy while ethical in nature did not neglect some metaphysical questions. He did, for example, believe in Moral Law; which is eternal. This echoed Gandhi's view in which God's Law is eternal and inseparable from God Himself. When we accept moral law as eternal, we accept God who also eternal. When the highest importance is given to moral law, the highest importance is also given to God. In this understanding, God can be reached and worshiped not only through rituals but by right, ethical living, by renunciation and humble service to humanity. It is with this in mind, that Gandhi said Buddha restored God to His eternal place and in turn made an important contribution to humanity. Another important contribution of Buddha was his teaching his followers to respect all living things, not just human life. Gandhi wrote,

Great as the Buddha's contribution to humanity was in restoring God to His eternal place, in my humble opinion, greater still was his contribution to humanity in his exacting regards of all life, be it ever so low. ⁹¹

C. Gandhi's view on Christianity

1. Gandhi's Contact with Christianity

In his autobiography, *The Story of my Experiment with Truth*, Gandhi described the religious environment of his childhood in which he grew and his early contact with Christianity. In his childhood, Gandhi's impression of Christianity was shaped by

91. *Ibid.*, p. 97

aggressive evangelical missionaries, from whom he received a distorted view of Christianity. From these missionaries Gandhi got the impression that for accepting the Christian faith meant eating beef, drinking liquor, and dressing like a European. All these things created in Gandhi a distaste for Christianity. Gandhi expressed his feeling with thusly,,

These things got on my nerves. Surely, thought I, a religion that compelled one to eat beef, drink liquor, and change one's own clothes did not deserve the name; I also heard that the new convert had already begun abusing the religion of his ancestors, their customs, and their country. All these things created in me a dislike for Christianity.⁹²

It was in 1887, while Gandhi was studying in London that he met good, practicing Christians for the first time. On the advice of a friend, Gandhi read the Bible for the first time. He found it difficult to understand the Old Testament, but he was impressed with the teachings of the New Testament. Gandhi claimed, that the Sermon on the Mount "went straight to my heart,"⁹³.

When he went to South Africa as lawyer to serve the Indian community in 1893, he again came into contact with Christianity. Here he made many Christian friends who invited him to visit their families, attend prayer meetings, Sunday services, and participate in religious discussions. During this time Gandhi read many books on Christianity. He especially studied intensively Tolstoy's books: *The Gospels in Brief*, *What to Do?* and *The Kingdom of God is within You*. These books made a deep impression on him. During this time he also seriously considered embracing the Christian faith. He expressed this desire thusly:

I did once seriously think of embracing the Christian faith. 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. I thought it was a beautiful example of the perfect man.⁹⁴

92. *Gandhi On Christianity*, p. 4

93. *Ibid.*, p. 5

94. *Ibid.*, p. 12

But, ultimately, Gandhi chose not to leave his own religion and embrace Christianity. In South Africa, when Mrs. Polak asked him why he did not, Gandhi answered,

I studied your Scriptures for some time and thought earnestly about them. I was tremendously attracted to Christianity, but, eventually, I came to the conclusion that there was nothing really in your Scriptures that we had not got in ours, and that to be a good Hindu also meant that I would be a good Christian. There is no need for me to join your creed to be a believer in the beauty of the teachings of Jesus or to try to follow his example.⁹⁵

Here Gandhi certainly recognized the greatness of Christ and the truth in His teaching. However, he could not see enough of a reason to change religions, especially when he saw the same truth revealed in his own religion. In other words, he could still follow Jesus' teachings while remaining faithful to his own religion. Changing religion would not in itself make him a better follower of Jesus.

2. Jesus Gandhi Loved

As stated earlier, in childhood Gandhi got a distorted impression of Christianity from evangelical missionaries, which instilled in him a negative impression of the religion. But later in his life, after he read the Bible and met and made Christian friends in England and South Africa, his childhood impression changed. He began to understand the essence of teaching of Christianity while reading the Sermon on the Mount. (He kept the Beatitudes hanging on his wall). He later wrote,

As my contact with real Christians, i.e., men living in fear of God, increased, I saw that the Sermon of the Mount was the whole of Christianity for him who wanted to live a Christian life. It is that Sermon which has endeared Jesus to me.⁹⁶

Gandhi perceived an essential unity between the Sermon on the Mount and the teachings of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, particularly those teachings relating to morality, the eradication of evil, the purification of motivations and the the spirit of unity. To him, the Sermon on the Mount expounded, in wonderful language, the same moral law as did

Gandhi made this remark while having a conversation with Mrs. Polak who's husband Mr. Henry Polak became a disciple of Gandhi in South Africa.

95. *Ibid.*, p. 12

96. *Ibid.*, p. 22

the *Gita*. He said, "Today, supposing, I was deprived of the *Gita* and forgot all its contents but had a copy of the Sermon, I should derive the same joy from it as I do from the *Gita*."⁹⁷

Gandhi was never interested in the historical Jesus; he never wanted proof that the man called Jesus ever lived. The Sermon on the Mount was enough proof for him to see the greatness of Jesus. Gandhi loved the non-violent image of the Jesus who gave love as a new commandment; (the exact opposite of the Old Testament "eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.") Rather, this love is willing to receive two blows while only one was given, and goes two miles when asked to go but one. He loved the image of Jesus on the cross. For him the cross was a symbol of sacrifice. Jesus' death on the cross stood as the highest expression of his love for humanity. It expressed perfectly the meaning and purpose of human life. Gandhi wrote,

And so, as the miraculous birth is an eternal event, so is the Cross an eternal event in this stormy life. Therefore, we dare not think of birth without death on the cross. Living Christ means a living cross, without it life is a living death.⁹⁸

Gandhi loved the image of Jesus who was meek, humble: a peacemaker. One who found happiness in the search for Truth, always choosing non-violent means, being uncompromising with untruth and even accepting self-suffering and death for the cause of Truth. For Gandhi, Jesus was truly a prince amongst *Satyagrahis*. Gandhi's concept of *Satyagraha* was deeply influenced by the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus' self sacrifice on the cross for a noble cause.

3. The Place of Jesus

Christians believe Jesus was the Son of God and Gandhi did not have any objection to their belief, but he was not prepared to accept Jesus as the only Son of God. He also made it clear that whether or not he recognized Jesus as the only Son of God or not did not affect the influence of Jesus' teaching in his life. He recognized Jesus as one of

97. M.K. Gandhi, *Christian missions*, (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1960), p. 127.

See also Rama Shanker Srivastava op.cit., 170

98. *Gandhi On Christianity*, p.23

the greatest teachers of humanity. Gandhi saw Jesus' message as universal and that no one could limit Jesus. Gandhi wrote,

What does Jesus mean to me? To me, He was one of the greatest teachers humanity has ever had. To His believers, He was God's only begotten Son. Could the fact that I do or do not accept this belief make Jesus have any more or less influence in my life? Is all the grandeur of His teaching and of His doctrine to be forbidden to me? I cannot believe so.⁹⁹

Gandhi rejected the idea that Jesus was the only incarnation of God on the grounds that this statement is too exclusive. He placed Jesus as equal to Krishna, Rama, Mohammed and Zoroaster. To him, all were equally incarnated divine persons. As Gandhi understood it, God could not be the exclusive Father to anyone; He is the Father of all creation. Gandhi accepted this concept literally. This is how he interpreted the divine sonship of Jesus:

To me it (the word 'begotten') implies a spiritual birth. My interpretation, in other words, is that in Jesus' own life is the key of His nearness to God; that He expresses as no other could, the spirit and will of God. It is in this sense that I see Him and recognize Him as the Son of God.¹⁰⁰

4. Critique on Mission and Conversion

Gandhi's understanding of mission and conversion went much deeper than the general understanding of these words. He was not opposed to missionary activities and conversion seen from a broad perspective. However, Gandhi was opposed to the idea of converting people to Christianity by linking salvation exclusively to the embracing of the Christian faith. Likewise, Gandhi also opposed the idea of changing religion in order to be saved. Gandhi was not against conversion if it was based on personal conviction and according to one's own will. He was, however, opposed to the use of force, or propaganda in relation to conversion. Gandhi recognized missionary work as a noble work. However, Gandhi believed that this noble work had to be done in the spirit of humble service to the poorest of the poor. It had to be done not through words or propaganda, but by living witness. He used poetic language in describing mission:

99. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 98

100. *Ibid.*, p. 99

A rose does not need to preach. It simply spreads its fragrance. The fragrance is its own sermon. If it had human understanding and if it could engage a number of preachers, the preachers would not be able to sell more roses than the fragrance itself could do. The fragrance of religion and spiritual life is much finer and much subtler than that of a rose.¹⁰¹

Christian missionaries came to India under the shadow and protection of a temporal power. This often created an impassable bar between missionary and Indian. Often missionaries thought India was a place of idolaters who did not know God. While addressing missionaries in India Gandhi told them, “you, the missionaries, come to India thinking that you come to a land of heathens, of idolaters, of men who do not know God.”¹⁰² Traveling all over India without any prejudice, Gandhi further said,

... in a relentless search after truth, and I am not able to say that here in this fair land, watered by the great Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Jumna, man is vile. He is not vile. He is as much a seeker after truth as you and I are, possibly more so.¹⁰³

5. Critique on Western Practice of Christianity

Gandhi had a very critical view of the west and the manner in which Christianity was generally practiced there. Gandhi’s criticism came from his own experience of living in the west and also from the colonial experience his homeland. As a byproduct of colonialism, Europe was seen as domineering and controlling throughout much of the world, including India. Gandhi associated the west with violence and war. He experienced the evil effects of two world wars in his lifetime. These two wars were initiated in Europe, the so-called Christian part of the world. Further, the Christian West was absorbed in materialism and seemed to measure its moral progress through material success, forgetting the moral and spiritual values Christ taught. It seemed to Gandhi that Christianity was professed only on the lips of Christians in Europe, but that the real spirit of Christ was missing in these Christians’ lives. He wrote,

101. *Harijan*, March 29, 1935

102. *Young India*, August 6, 1925

103. *Ibid.*

It is my firm opinion that Europe today represents not the spirit of God or Christianity, but the spirit of Satan. And Satan's successes are the greatest when he appears with the name of God on his lips. Europe is today only nominally Christian. In reality it is worshipping Mammon. "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom." Thus really spoke Jesus Christ. His so-called followers measure their moral progress by their material possessions.¹⁰⁴

There is a great deal of truth in Gandhi's comment. While Gandhi was fighting against the caste system and untouchability in his own society, he found that a similar evil existed in western society in racial prejudice. Gandhi himself was a victim of color prejudice.

The whole of Europe, once considered Christian, is now undergoing a change. Some parts of Europe are now only culturally Christian. According to a recent survey done by ICM (ICM???) for BBC programming, only 67% of Briton respondents believe in God. In the U K only 21% of the people regularly attend religious services and in Russia that percentage is even lower, being only 7%.¹⁰⁵

6. Critique on Dogmatism

For Christians belief in certain dogmas is essential. Faith is defined in and through dogmas and doctrines. These dogmas and doctrines may make a religion exclusive or, rather, some people may interpret them narrowly and as exclusive. Gandhi was not opposed to dogma, but he *was* opposed to dogmatism. It was noted earlier that Gandhi held that no religion could claim to be absolutely perfect.¹⁰⁶ If Christianity claimed that it was the only true religion, then, for Gandhi it would fall victim to dogmatism.

It is true Gandhi was a critic of some aspects of Christianity. Among all religions, other than Hinduism, no other religion impressed, inspired or influenced Gandhi as did Christianity. He was impressed by the gentle and compassionate life example of Christ. He was influenced by the dedication, and renunciation of the crucified Jesus. He was inspired by the moral, social and spiritual teaching of Jesus on the Sermon of the Mount.

104. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p.97

105. *BBC News*, May 18, 2004

106. *Mahatma Gandhi and Comparative religion*, p. 32

D. Gandhi's view on Islam

1. Gandhi's Contact with Islam

Gandhi's first contact with Muslims took place in his father's house. During his early childhood, men from different religious communities were welcomed in his father's house. Gandhi used to listen attentively to the discussions on religious matters. These experiences enabled him at an early age to grow in respect of other religions.

In 1893, when Gandhi went to Durban, South Africa, he met Abdullah Sheth, a Muslim friend who gave him a short course in Islam. Sheth encouraged Gandhi to study Islam. During this time Gandhi bought a copy of the Koran and began to read. While reading the Koran and other books on Islam he concluded, "I certainly regard Islam a one of the inspired religions and, therefore, the Holy Koran as an inspired book and Muhammad as one of the prophets."¹⁰⁷

2. Contribution of Islam Particularly in India

a. Unadulterated belief in the oneness of God

Islam does not claim Muhammad as divine, but the last prophet of God. For this reason Islam is considered one of the purest, monotheistic religions.¹⁰⁸ The fundamental principle of Islam is belief in the unity of God. He is infinite and eternal, all-powerful, self-caused, self sufficient and spiritual in nature. Islam, as an absolutely monotheistic religion, is deadly opposed to any form of polytheism. In Islam man is commanded to reject anything other than God as object of worship. This is the essential principle of Islam as a religion. The absolute monotheism of Islam, according to Gandhi, is its unique contribution, particularly to India. He puts it this way, "Islam's distinctive contribution to India's national culture is its unadulterated belief in the oneness of God..."¹⁰⁹ This is because at the heart of Hinduism, there is belief only in one God, while in practice there is worship of many personal gods. Gandhi explained, "Though philosophical Hinduism has no other god but God, it cannot

107. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p.100

108. *Mahatma Gandhi and Comparative religion*, p.41

109. *Ibid.*, p.100

be denied that practical Hinduism is not so emphatically uncompromising as Islam.”¹¹⁰

b. Concept of Brotherhood of man

According to Gandhi, the spirit of the brotherhood of man in Hinduism has become more philosophical than real.¹¹¹ Gandhi was impressed by the teaching and application of the brotherhood in Islam. Islam, as a religion of peace, finds peace by paying homage to the oneness of God and in being one with neighbors. The foundation of Islamic brotherhood is the belief in the oneness of God. God is one; this is why all men belong to one human family. Men have a common origin and common destiny. In Gandhi's view the concept of the Brotherhood of Man was another unique contribution of Islam, especially within the Indian context. He wrote,

Islam's distinctive contribution to Indian's national culture is its unadulterated belief in the oneness of God and a practical application of the truth of the brotherhood of man for those who are nominally within its fold.¹¹²

3. Qur'anic Teaching on Non-Violence

According to Gandhi, Islam as the religion of Peace is a non-violent religion. Its holy book, the *Qur'an*, does not teach the use of force; it says, rather, that non-violence is better than violence. The Prophet of Islam preached the message of truth and love and preferred non-violence over violence. Though Mohammad had to wage wars against wrongdoers, his wars were basically for defense. He also taught to surrender the ego to God. It is unfortunate that some people think violence is the creed of the Muslim religion. The existence of violence in Islam is not because of *Qur'anic* teaching, but most probably due to the environment in which the Muslim religion was born. Gandhi wrote,

I have come to the conclusion that the teaching of the Koran is essentially in favour of non-violence. Non-violence is better than violence, as it is said in the Koran. Non-violence is enjoined as a duty; violence is permitted as a necessity.¹¹³

110. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 100

111. *Ibid.*

112. *Ibid.*

113. *Ibid.*

4. Gandhi had High Regards for Islam for its following Aspects

a. Islam As Religion Of Peace

Gandhi accepted Islam as a peace loving religion. Even though Muslims sometimes took up the sword, the essential teaching of *Qur'an* is non-violence. It teaches the Muslim to live in peace and harmony in the society. Gandhi wrote,

I do regard Islam to be a religion of peace in the same sense as Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism are. No doubt there are differences in degree, but the object of these religions is peace.¹¹⁴

b. Concept Of Brotherhood Of Man

We have seen that Islam gives great emphasis to the common brotherhood of man. In other words, the goal of Islam is the establishment of universal brotherhood. This concept of universal brotherhood of man derives from the essential belief in the unity of God. The Islamic teaching of Kalima (The unity of God) teaches that God is one. This belief leads to the belief in the oneness of man, the unity of all men. The Islamic teaching of Kalima removes all obstacles that hinder the unity among men. It prescribes a social order that makes equality and brotherhood of men a living reality.

Gandhi fought against untouchability and the caste system in his own Hindu society. The concept of brotherhood in Islam inspired Gandhi in this endeavor. He too believed in the universal brotherhood of men on the basis of Fatherhood of God. He wrote, "I believe in the absolute oneness of God and, therefore, of humanity".¹¹⁵

c. Tolerance

The *Qur'an's* teaching on tolerance, which inspires Muslims to be tolerant of people of other religions, also impressed Gandhi. The *Qur'an* teaches that differences among men are natural and part of the divine plan. It strongly promotes inter-religious understanding and harmony. When the Prophet Muhammad was confronted with unbelievers, he did not quarrel with them. Rather, he dealt with them justly.¹¹⁶ Islam, like Christianity, allows proselytization. Forceful or coercive conversion is not advocated, however. Gandhi rejected the opinion that Islam is a triumphal, non-tolerant fanaticism, spread by the sword. He wrote,

114. *Ibid.*

115. *Young India*, September 25, 1925

116. *Islam, The religion of peace*, p. 61

My association with the noblest of Mussalmans has taught me to see that Islam has spread not by the power of the sword; but the prayerful love of an unbroken line of its saints and fakirs.¹¹⁷

He further said,

There is nothing in the Koran to warrant the use of force for conversion. The Holy Book says in the clearest language possible, "There is no compulsion in religion". The Prophet's whole life is a repudiation of compulsion in religion. No Mussalman, to my knowledge, has ever approved of compulsion. Islam would cease to be a world religion if it were to reply upon force for its propagation.¹¹⁸

d. Personal And Social Codes Of Behavior

Gandhi very much appreciated the personal and social codes of Islam. The holy Koran prescribed the rules and regulations as personal and social virtues. The Prophet Mohammad was not interested in merely vain metaphysics. He applied principles to improve the social condition of His people. Virtues like respect for parents, avoidance of adultery, stealing, cheating, lying and murder, are some of the important teachings of Islam. Moreover, belief, prayer, fasting, alms giving and pilgrimage, the five pillars of Islam, which every Muslim is to perform, are also means to transform human life from a lower to a higher level. All these aspects of Islam deeply influenced Gandhi.

The above discussion of Gandhi's view on other religions shows that Gandhi entered into comparative religious study with great interest. He studied the scriptures of the major religions and found truth in all of them. He pointed out the important aspects of the different religions, appreciated them and found his life influenced by them. With conviction he professed Hinduism which he saw as the religion of humanity because it included the best of all religions. In entering the heart of his own religion, he was inspired to love and respect the faith of other religions. He could bravely point out the limitations of other religions--those which he found contrary to his faith and convictions. He believed that all religions are true, yet have limitations. Ultimately, Gandhi found essential unity in the diversity of religion; a unity that binds all men together.

117. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p.100

118 *Ibid*.

CHAPTER FOUR

GANDHI'S INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE FOR PEACE AND HARMONY

I. GANDHI ON INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

A. Introduction

In the present, pluralistic, religious reality of the world no one can deny the importance and urgency of inter-religious dialogue for peaceful and harmonious social living. In the midst of fanaticism, terrorism, conflict and division, there is a great desire among the major religions for dialogue in order to promote and sustain peace and harmony in society. But what should be the basis and means for fruitful dialogue?

For dialogue, it is essential to find a common ground and common methodology on which all religions can agree. A thorough study of religions on theoretical and practical levels indicates that there is basis in Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and Islamic traditions and teachings for the promotion of dialogue. Truth (*Satya*) and non-violence (*Ahimsa*), the core concepts of Gandhi's philosophy, are the essential teachings of all religions. All religions are searching for the ultimate Truth. There are many approaches to Truth, but like Gandhi, all religions prefer to approach Truth through *Ahimsa* or love. Truth, therefore, becomes the common ground for dialogue and *Ahimsa*, the common methodology; Truth is the end and *Ahimsa* or love is the means to attain the Truth. The fruits of inter-religious dialogue, based on truth and approached in non-violence, should therefore be peace and harmony.

This chapter demonstrates how Gandhi himself applied these two principles for inter-religious dialogue in his time. Further, it illustrates how these values can serve today as the ground for inter-religions dialogue in order to promote peace and harmony in society.

1. Gandhi: the Man of Dialogue

Gandhi was born and grew up in a healthy, religious, family environment. He described his father as a very truthful man and his mother as a saintly woman who practiced religion with prayer, fasting and visiting the temple. His father's truthfulness and mother's saintliness made a deep impression on Gandhi's life.

His father had many friends of all faiths who frequently came to him for religious discussions. Young Gandhi, while attending to his father, used to listen to these religious discussions with Hindus, Muslims, Jains and Parsis. It is partially due to these welcoming and open religious discussions that Gandhi grew up respecting and tolerating other faiths. Later in life, his comparative study of religions and their scriptures confirmed his faith and conviction in what he had learned during his childhood. His religious background and the foundation for ecumenism provided by his family played important roles in his work for communal harmony. His deep faith in God and religion impelled him to write about communal harmony and inter-religious dialogue.

2. Gandhi as Practical Dreamer

Gandhi claimed not to be a visionary but a practical idealist. He did not dream for the sake of dreaming. He did not create concepts as toys with which to play in the human mind. All through his life he was faithful and sincere in order to give reality to his thoughts and words. He admitted that his key concepts of truth and non-violence were "as old as the hills,"¹ but he translated these two concepts into his life and made them a living reality. Gandhi wrote, "I am indeed a practical dreamer. My dreams are not airy nothing. I want to convert my dream into realities as far as possible".²

Gandhi had a dream. His dream was not only for Hinduism and India but rather for the whole world, for all living beings, excluding no one. His vision was of a new world order, in which there would be a unity of mankind, and dignity and freedom for every human being, love and respect for all life, and in which God would reign supreme. His vision was of universal Brotherhood under the

1. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p.25

2. *Ibid.*, p. 8

Fatherhood of God; God was the Father and all men were brothers forming the one family of God. He based this new world order on truth and non-violence. Flowing from this new world order would be a moral, just, classless and non-violent society where people of different faiths would live in peace and harmony.

For Gandhi this was not an impossible dream or an idealistic vision. It could begin to be achieved in the here and now by strong willed determination. Gandhi explained his vision thus:

I shall work for an India in which the poorest shall feel that it is their country, in whose making they have an effective voice; an India in which there shall be no high class and low class of people; an India in which all communities shall live in perfect harmony. There can be no room in such an India the curse of untouchability, or the curse of intoxicating drinks and drugs. Women will enjoy the same rights as men.

Since we shall be at peace with all the rest of the world, neither exploiting nor being exploited... All Interests not in conflict with the interests of the dumb millions will be scrupulously respected, whether foreign or indigenous. Personally, I hate distinction between foreign and indigenous. This is the India of my dreams... I shall be satisfied with nothing else.³

Gandhi's dream has to be understood in relation to the Hindu worldview. The Hindu worldview is primarily moral, concerned with social order. Human life has to be ordered in the correct relationship with God without which social order is impossible.

Gandhi's vision was not for India alone (though he wanted to see it first in his motherland). His vision looked beyond India to the whole world. He believed that his message and his method expressed in his vision were universal. As he said,

If I can say so without arrogance and with due humility, my message and method are, indeed, in their essentials for the whole world and it gives me keen satisfaction to know they have already received a wonderful response in the hearts of a large and daily growing number of men and women in the West.⁴

3. *Ibid.*, p. 314

4. *Young India*, Sept. 17, 1925

The vision of Gandhi in its essence was not only Hindu, but also very much Buddhist, Christian and Islamic. His concepts of unity, harmony and universal Brotherhood, based on Truth (God) and non-violence, were explained as expressions of the end goals of all religions, differently described as Self-realization, the Kingdom of God, and *Nirvana*.

3. Gandhi as Missionary

Many critics of Gandhi accused him of basing his vision on the incorrect assumption that the world consists of only saints and sages. But these critiques were themselves based on a misinterpretation of Gandhi's vision. Gandhi was indeed a spiritual man, but he did not spiritualize everything. Gandhi's answered his critics by saying,

If any action of mine claimed to be spiritual is proved to be unpractical, it must be pronounced to be a failure. I do believe that the most spiritual act is the most practical in the true sense of the term.⁵

The two principles of truth and non-violence on which Gandhi's vision is based, are not only meant for the sages and saints. These can be applied by every man and woman of good will. These are the essential teachings of all religions and every lover of truth, and every man and woman of faith follows these two principles. Moreover, Gandhi recognized human limitations; he confessed his own errors with humility. He recognized that as long as we are made with human flesh and blood, there cannot be an absolutely, nonviolent society, (even though he felt non-violence was the ideal strived for by all civilized societies). Sincere dedication and commitment to this vision were more important to Gandhi than its success.

Gandhi had a sincere commitment to fulfill his vision, which was actualized in his mission. Here lies an important difference between Gandhi and many other world thinkers and idealists. Gandhi did not philosophize for philosophy's sake. Rather, he tried to put his beliefs and convictions into action. Gandhi viewed his life as a mission to see God (Truth) and to bring about unity and the brotherhood of man. He chose the path of humble service to bring about liberation

5. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 8

and the unity of humanity. He believed the only way to see God was in and through the service of human beings. As he said,

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 Him. This can only be done through the service of all.⁶

Gandhi's dedication and loving service to humanity is the concrete proof of his involvement in the dialogue of life. Gandhi argued that to see God one has to turn toward and identify with humanity. To give a living reality to his faith and conviction was his mission. Though he began his mission in India, he always looked beyond India, for he held that his message was universal. Gandhi wrote,

My mission is not merely brotherhood of Indian humanity. My mission is not merely freedom of India, though today it undoubtedly engrosses practically the whole of life and whole of my time. But, through realization of freedom of India, I hope to realize and carry on the mission of brotherhood of man.⁷

Gandhi strongly believed that his mission was divine: *Dharma*. Within this mission, truth and non-violence, the essence of *Dharma*, are manifested concretely in and through the service of humanity.

Gandhi had no desire to go to the West for sightseeing. However, if it had been God's will, he was ready to carry the mission to the West. The method he would employ to disseminate his message in the West would be nonviolent dialogue, not public speaking or public demonstration. In dialogue he would speak to the heart of the masses, particularly to the youth. His very life would become the message for the youth and the masses. He wrote,

If God ever sent me to the West, I should go there to penetrate the hearts of the masses, to have quiet talks with the youth of the West and have the privilege of meeting kindred spirits- lovers of peace at any price save that of truth.⁸

6. *Harijan*, August 29, 1939

7. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 28

8. *Ibid.*, p. 30

Gandhi was optimistic that every peace loving person in the West would welcome his mission. But Gandhi was also realistic for he stated, "Millions, like me may fail to prove the truth in their own lives, that would be their failure, never of the eternal law."⁹ He believed this because he believed that *Ahimsa* is *paramadharma* (eternal religion) and every true religious person was bound to accept this principle in his or her life. This principle is non-negotiable and uncompromising. If an individual person or a group of people fails to live this principle, it does not prove that it is invalid. The failure of many should not be read as an excuse for others to reject the principle. One of the main reasons why people hesitate to adopt this principle is that they pay more attention to success, rather than to the process involving dedication and a determined will. If everyone made a sincere effort and willed it, then success would surely follow. Gandhi wrote,

The world of tomorrow will be, must be, a society based on non-violence. It may seem a distant goal, an impractical utopia. But it is not in the least unobtainable, since it can be worked from here and now. An individual can adopt the way of life of the future- the non-violent way- without having to wait for others to do so. And if an individual can do it, cannot whole groups of individuals? Whole nations? Men often hesitate to make a beginning because they feel that the objective cannot be achieved in its entirety. This attitude of mind is precisely our greatest obstacle to progress- an obstacle that each man, if he only wills it, can clear away.¹⁰

Gandhi viewed life as an opportunity to be shared with the masses. Communion and the common good were of great significance to him. As he said, "I hate privilege and monopoly. Whatever cannot be shared with the masses is taboo to me."¹¹ According to Gandhi belief in "I" and "Mine" were the cause of many troubles and religious, political and economic conflicts. If we could erase egoism, Gandhi believed, we could be "free and bring heaven upon earth."¹²

9. *Ibid.*, p. 30

10. *Ibid.*, p. x-xi

11. *Ibid.*, p. 5

12. *Ibid.*, p.5

B. Gandhi's engagement in inter-religious dialogue

As explained earlier, Gandhi grew up in a family with the true Indian spirit of multi-religious co-existence. Both in England and South Africa, he exposed himself to multi-religious cultures; he also studied extensively different religions. He was searching for the true meaning of religion and its authentic practice. What he discovered in his search was the truth that the source of all religions is one. All religions are true and are searching for the same Truth. This reality led him to work for inter-religious harmony, for the true practice of religion does not separate men but, rather, binds men together.

Gandhi was not an academic philosopher and he never claimed to be one. Similarly, his practice of inter-religious dialogue did not emerge from an organized, philosophical system of thought. He was not interested in an intellectual dialogue of ideas and theologies. His dialogue was more practical than theoretical. For this reason his inter-religious dialogue with "Christianity" and "Islam" cannot be viewed from an abstract, theoretical perspective. His dialogue with Christians and Muslims was done shoulder and shoulder with those with whom he lived and worked. His dialogue was a dialogue of life, which emerged from his lived experience.

Gandhi's life-energy was spent in the promotion of Hindu-Muslim unity. While working for India's freedom from British colonial power and the reformation of the socio-economic, political and religious aspects of Indian life, Gandhi experienced the evil effects of the religious conflicts, communal riots and violence arising between Hindus and Muslims. This was the context in which all of his inter-religious dialogue efforts were tested.

Gandhi's dream was the independence of an undivided India. That is, an India where Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and Christians could live together in communion. In August 1947, India peacefully achieved political freedom from the British by nonviolent means, but India was ultimately divided into two nations, India and Pakistan. What saddened Gandhi most about this partition was that it violated the idea of peaceful multi-confessional coexistence.

During the partition, communal violence spread between Hindus and Muslims in different parts of the country. Hundreds of thousands of Hindus and Muslims were killed in Bengal, Bihar and

Punjab. Gandhi consoled and brought hope to the Noakhali victims of communal hatred and violence in East Bengal in 1946 (a district of the present Bangladesh). He worked tirelessly to build bridges between Hindu and Muslim communities, foregoing the Independence Celebration in Delhi. In the midst of hatred and violence, he preached good will and unity in the name of peace and harmony. He fearlessly addressed the seething crowds, telling those assembled that Hindus, Muslims and Christians were all brothers, and sons of the same God. He exhorted Hindus:

You have to live in a world which has Christians and Mussalmans, great communities owning great faiths. You have to live in the midst of these whether they are two percent or twenty percent. And if I know Hinduism right, Hinduism is nothing if it is not tolerant and generous to every other faith. And seeing that you are in a vast majority, it is up to you to make advances and settle all your disputes. And if you will get rid of the wretched caste spirit which has crept into Hinduism you will find that all the difficulties will disappear.¹³

Gandhi knew he was dealing with a big problem. He was facing religious fanaticism and bigotry, ignorance and superstition, selfishness and even atheism. It is difficult to evaluate his success in building harmonious relationships between Hindu and Muslim communities. It is sure, however, that he was sincere in his attempts to bridge the two communities, sincere to his very last breath. Because of his tolerant and non-violent approach to his Muslim brothers, an intolerant Hindu extremist fired three shots with a revolver and killed Gandhi on January 30, 1948. An extremist of Gandhi's own faith killed a saint who had dedicated his whole life for communal harmony through peaceful dialogue. He had wanted not only to establish communion and harmony among Hindus and Muslims but among persons of all the religions of the world. As he once wrote, "Hindu-Muslim unity means not only unity between Hindus and Mussalmans, but between all those who believe India to be their home- no matter to what faith they belong."¹⁴

13. *Young India*, December 15, 1927

14. *Ibid.*, April 16, 1931

Gandhi's inter-religious dialogue can be described on two levels: theoretical and practical.

1. Theoretical Dialogue

Gandhi truly believed that ignorance of the religions of others creates misunderstanding, prejudices, conflicts and unwillingness to accept the truth that exists in other religions. When people fail to see the human dimension of all religions, they quarrel over each other's religion. People are led to mutual discrimination and bloodshed when they lack sensitive understanding of another's faith. Ignorance of one's own religion also makes people arrogant and fanatic.

Gandhi's approach to theoretical dialogue was a sympathetic understanding of all the living religions of the world. He believed that education without the study of religion was incomplete because religion is a vital aspect of human culture and civilization. Men neglecting the study of religion ran the risk of failing to understand humanity and history. Gandhi was humble and eager to learn from other religious traditions. As a seeker of truth, he studied the scriptures of all the major religions, including his own. His study of other religions enabled him to see that every religion was revealed in different periods of time in history to serve and uphold human life. Likewise, he saw that no religious tradition was perfect. He saw that all religions needed purification and reformation. In order to make this purification possible every religion has its sages and saints. He was impressed by the values revealed by each religion. While he found truth in every religion, his purpose of dialogue was not to reject religious differences but to learn to appreciate the faith and practices of each religion. He truly believed that gaining knowledge and appreciation of other religions makes Hindus better Hindus, Christians better Christians and Muslims better Muslims. For this reason Gandhi preached that the friendly study of the religions of the world was a sacred duty of every man. He wrote,

I hold that it is the duty of every cultured man and women to read sympathetically the scriptures of the world. If we are to respect others' religions as we would have them to respect our own, a friendly study of the world's religions is a sacred duty.¹⁵

15. *Ibid.*, Sept. 2, 1926

Gandhi had the capacity to assimilate the insights of other traditions; he recognized how the insights of other religions enriched his own religious understandings. He realized that the truth and value each religion preaches belong to all people and should be precious to people of all faiths. Therefore, he believed that no religion should bar its followers from studying other religions. Gandhi's believed that the sympathetic study of all religions, is important for inter-religious dialogue as it sensitizes people of different traditions to one another.

2. Practical Dialogue

Gandhi was not very interested in formal philosophical and theological dialogue. For him logic and reason play less important roles in inter-religious dialogue. Logic and reason alone cannot aid persons in their search for truth through non-violence and dialogue. What is needed is faith, for faith does not contradict reason but transcends it. Gandhi wrote,

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.¹⁶

But this does not mean that Gandhi was without logic or irrational. For him, religion was a matter of the heart, rather than the head. He felt that it was the same with inter-religious dialogue. Religious relationships fostered through dialogue cannot take place on rational and intellectual grounds alone. Communion and community between people and groups are matters of heart, are personal experiences. This is why Gandhi emphasized intuition, the inner voice or the conscience as theological awareness.¹⁷

While Gandhi did not ignore the theoretical level of dialogue, his own interfaith dialogue emphasized the practical aspect of religion. For him, communal harmony through dialogue emerged practically as a constructive program. His ashrams, both in South Africa and India, were formation centers where motivated people practiced

16. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 64

17. Nirmal Minz, *Religion and Society*, Vol. XVI, No. 3, (Sept. 1969), p. 35-44

vows, which included the vow of communal harmony. These ashrams became outstanding examples of harmonious living. Within these communities, people engaged daily in dialogue, with truth and non-violence: experimentally living the dialogue, if you were. They lived a life of simplicity, purity and service, forgetting the differences of their color, race, nationality and creed. Gandhi gave the training, the mentoring of heart and spirit, through his lived example. Gandhi encouraged everyone to keep his or her respective religious observances. Muslims maintained their respective times of prayer and fasting; Christians attended to the season of Lent; Hindus kept their *Pradosah* (fasting until evening). This is how they learned the values of fasting, prayer and self-denial, which are essential for the practice of non-violence. In faithfully observing their respective religious observances in the ashram's supportive environment, mutual relationships based on love and respect matured.

Gandhi motivated people of different faiths in South Africa and India to work and struggle together for freedom and justice. He did this by appealing to their highest ideals. When he was the leader of the Indian National Congress, he included Hindus, Muslim, Christians, Buddhists and the followers of other faiths in the Congress' freedom movement.¹⁸ Each and everyone in the movement was reminded to use the highest values of their own faith to fulfill their responsibility toward their fellow human beings.

Disregarding strong opposition, Gandhi invited an untouchable family into his Ahmedabad *ashram*. He even adopted a girl from an untouchable family as his own daughter. Many did not like this action on his part and abandoned his ashram, but Gandhi never recanted these actions for they were based on moral principle. For some time, he sought to make a bolder statement against untouchability by moving to live with the untouchables in the city quarters. For a number of reasons this move did not take place and in a short time, opposition to his stance disappeared, though he continued to publicly campaign for the removal of the evil practice of untouchability from Hindu society.

18. *Mahatma Gandhi and Comparative Religion*, p. 154

One of the biggest challenges Gandhi faced was Hindu-Muslim unity. Hindu-Muslim unity was essential for an independent India. While Gandhi undertook many constructive programs to improve the lives of the people, he gave number one priority to the programs that worked for Hindu-Muslim unity. He believed that India would remain crippled as a nation if Hindu-Muslim unity did not become a reality. In his writings, Gandhi stressed,

Without Hindu-Muslim, i.e., communal unity we shall always remain crippled. And how can a crippled India win swaraj? Communal unity means unity between Hindus, Sikhs, Mussalmans, Christians, Parsis, Jews. All these go to make Hindustan. He who neglects any of these communities does not know constructive work.¹⁹

The challenge to bring unity among India's differing religions, particularly between Hindus and Muslim, was so great that many asked how Gandhi could possibly do it. Gandhi answered them by saying, "Hindu-Muslim unity is possible if only we have mutual tolerance and faith in ourselves and therefore in the ultimate goodness of human nature."²⁰ Gandhi tried his very best to bring these two communities together so that Hindus and Muslims would sing together in mosques and temples and live in harmony and peace. He was ready to make the ultimate sacrifice of his life for the harmony and peace of this unity. He wrote, "I am striving to become the best cement between the two communities. My longing is to be able to cement the two with my blood, if necessary."²¹

Gandhi traveled all over India to be one with the masses. He wrote voluminous letters to people around the world. His travels and writings reveal how much Gandhi was involved in practical dialogue. His practical dialogue of life was based on truth and non-violence. Gandhi's inter-religious dialogue provided evidence of, among other things::

- a. A sensitive awareness of the existence of other religions, but not the elimination of religious differences.

19. Dennis Dalton (ed), *Selected Political Writings*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996), p. 108

20. *Ibid.*, p. 116

21. *Mahatma Gandhi and Comparative Religion*, p. 44.

- b. The creation of mutual learning and understanding of religion and its practices.
- d. The manner in which mutual learning and understanding helps to acknowledge the similarities and differences between and deepen the respect for each other's faith.
- e. The way in which inter-religious dialogue helped Gandhi to progressively reinterpret his own life and traditions; and
- f. Helped the masses move towards mutual co-operation on the common objectives of truth and justice in the social spheres.²²

C. Inter-religious Dialogue based on Satyagraha

In the past, attempts have been made to create a universal religion. Particularly, German philosopher Immanuel Kant attempted to create a universal, moral religion based on pure reason. Every man and woman through the exercise of pure reason is capable of following this religion. It can be shared by all people. In proposing this religion, Kant did not reject the importance of historical religions. Rather, he held that the value of these religions rested in encouraging and motivating people to accept the universal, moral religion. He made the prediction that historical religions would exist until they were gradually abandoned and ruled over by moral religion.²³

Gandhi's view differs greatly from Kant. For Gandhi, morality was an important aspect, but he never dreamed to use it to create a single, universal religion. Gandhi believed that this was an impossible dream since history teaches that universal religion can neither be -created nor imposed by others. Likewise, Kant wanted to create a universal religion based on pure reason, but Gandhi opposed this view. For Gandhi, religion was not so much a matter of the head as it was of the heart. Religion was not a product of the human intellect; instead, it was rooted in the direct experience of God by the

22. *Ibid.*, p. 155

23. Christopher Sinkinson, *The Universe of Faiths, A Critical Study of John Hick's Religious Pluralism*, (London: Paternoster Press, 2001), p. 90-93

prophets and seers. Moreover, the world did not need any more new religions. What was needed was the sincere practice of the existing religions. Gandhi's inter-religious dialogue on the basis of truth (the holding onto Truth- *Satyagraha*) and non-violence was his attempt to recognize and respect the truth in the diversity of faiths. To value mutual cooperation and to encourage people in the sincere practice and understanding of the respective faiths of each other.

1. Dialogue on the Basis of Truth

In religion, Truth is understood in two central ways. First, it may be understood as religious doctrines, everything is to be interpreted according to the truth of these doctrines. Within the context of this understanding of Truth, true dialogue is difficult. Such an orthodox construction creates conflicts and contradictions against pluralistic religions. Secondly, Truth in religion can be understood as the contact or vision of the Ultimate Reality or God. Within this conception, Truth is a commonly experienced Reality and there is openness to the possibility of dialogue among peoples.²⁴

As explained earlier, truth for Gandhi was the sovereign principle, which included all other principles. This truth was truthfulness in thought, word and deed. It was not only the relative truth of human conception, but it was also the Absolute Truth, the Eternal principle, that is God. Gandhi worshiped God as Truth, because for him there was no greater religion than Truth. He himself said that he did not fully know the Truth but rather, considered himself a humble seeker after Truth. His experience convinced him that there was no other God than Truth. God alone is the Absolute Truth and He alone knows the Absolute Truth, as it is God's attribute alone. Therefore, Truth as God is the aim and essence of all religions.

Some might question how this Truth becomes the basis for inter-religious dialogue. There are several ways that Truth lays the foundation for meaningful inter-religious dialogue.

a. Truth as the End of all Religions

Historical, religious traditions are not ends in themselves, because religions are not in themselves God. God is the End and religions are

24. *Mahatma Gandhi and Comparative Religion*, p. 122.

only the means to reach that very End. They reveal the way to God. Religions are instituted by humans and are bounded in space and time. They, therefore, cannot be absolutely perfect, for only God is perfect. He is the Absolute Truth and the end of all religions is the realization of God. This was the view of Gandhi on Truth as God and this is the place where all religions agree. Even as Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and Muslims follow their own religious traditions, they search for the same object, the Ultimate Truth. When these religious followers recognize each other's religions as true and legitimate means to attain the Truth as Ultimate end, then Truth becomes the basis or foundation for constructive dialogue; a dialogue in which the respect and tolerance of another's faith is grounded in the same shared Ultimate goal of life. Gandhi's view of inter-religious dialogue and peace and harmony its fruits, were the result of his ardent pursuit of Truth. He truly believed that the realization of God (Truth) made a man cooperative, helpful and human.²⁵

b. Truth as Unifying Principle

The reason behind the practice of religion and morality is the realization of Truth or God. For Gandhi Truth is the essential unity of everything. Gandhi did not deny those who said that God is Truth but after fifty years of relentless search; Gandhi concluded that Truth is God.

There is a difference between these two statements, i.e., God is Truth and Truth is God. In the first statement, Truth becomes one of the many attributes of God. In the second statement, God is equal to Truth. For Gandhi Truth best expresses the nature of God. Moreover, Truth is a unifying principle. There are many people who do not believe in the existence of God, but they have firm faith in the reality of Truth. Non-believers also search for Truth; even the skeptic agrees that Truth is the highest principle in the world. For Gandhi skeptics, even atheists, cannot be regarded as true atheists, because they while they may not be God-fearing people, they are Truth-fearing and for Gandhi Truth is God. For this reason Gandhi preferred to use the

25. Lala Gopal Prasad, *Religion, Morality, and Politics According to Mahatma Gandhi*, (New Delhi: Classical Publishing Company, 1991), p.32

word Truth; Truth is God. Here Truth unifies believers, atheists and skeptics and again becomes the basis for dialogue.

There are many conflicts and misunderstandings within and amongst the traditional conceptions of of God. God has different meanings in different religions. For this reason men of different religions remain divided and opposed to each other on the conception of God. Some people are monotheistic in faith, some are polytheistic and some, as in the case of Buddhism, do not use the word God in religion. In order to avoid the traditional word “God”, which allows narrow connotations in different religions, Gandhi replaced it with “Truth”. While people remain divided in the conception of God, they can cooperate in the name of Truth. Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and Muslims all have respect for Truth, and Truth thereby, becomes the unifying principle for dialogue.

c. Truth as Essential Principle for Human Existence

Truth is the cause of everything that exists. All life is derived from Truth and is directed toward the Truth. Truth gives meaning and directedness to human life. Therefore, all life is at the service of the Truth.

Gandhi never claimed to know the truth in the absolute sense. He reminded his readers that to pursue the Absolute Truth one has to maintain an open-minded approach. One has to be free from preconceptions and prejudices in order to pursue the Truth. Gandhi saw his life as a pilgrimage toward the Truth. Truth was the central principle of his life and his life was devoted to the Truth. This led him to correct living and openness toward others. All his activities were centered on Truth. He wrote,

Devotion to this Truth is the sole reason for our existence. All our activities should be centered in Truth. Truth should be the very breath of our lives. When once this stage in the pilgrim’s progress is reached, all other rules of correct living will come without effort, and obedience to them will be instinctive. But without Truth it would be impossible to observe any principles of rules of life.²⁶

When people, as Gandhi, view the Truth as the cause and end of human existence, prejudices and misconceptions about others

26. *Harijan*, January 30, 1937

disappear and minds are opened towards others' points of view. This opens the door for dialogue.

d. Truth Brings Fullness of Knowledge

Ignorance is the root cause of many inter-religious problems. It is only Truth that removes our ignorance. In order to *know* we need Truth, for without Truth we cannot know. Without truth there is no knowledge and what we do know, if it is not true, is not knowledge. In other words, it is only when we know the truth that we have knowledge. Truth dwells in the heart of every human being, but because of ignorance we do not realize Truth. Once we search for the Truth, ignorance disappears and we can realize God in every human heart regardless of religion, race and color. Kabir wrote,

Hari is made to dwell in the East, *Allah* in the West. But seek Him in your heart. You will find there both Karim and Rama. If God is only in the mosque, to whom does the country outside belong? Rama is supposed to be in the pilgrim places and in His images. But they have found Him in neither yet, who said that the Vedas and the book (the Koran) are false? They are so to those who do think. Within all bodies there is but One and no second. Man or women, they are but Thy form. Kabir is but a child of *Allah-Rama* and He is his Guru and Pir alike.²⁷

Truth is essential for human existence, because Truth is the basis of all existence and is also the end of all life. It is the ground of all being. The whole universe is the manifestation of the Truth. Truth is the ultimate reality and the supreme spirit. Theists call it God. All religions search to achieve one goal and that goal is nothing but the Truth. That Truth is found in every religion.

A religion that is closed is bound to perish. If a religion is to live, it must remain open, dynamic and in communion with other religions, the environment and current age. Since all religions are searching for the same object, which is Truth, no single religion can have a monopoly on Truth. As Gandhi said, "Revelation is the exclusive property of no nation, no tribe."²⁸ Truth is one, but man's

27. *Mahatma Gandhi and Comparative Religion*, p. 46

28. Robert Ellsberg (ed), *Gandhi On Christianity*, (New York: Orbis Books, Marynoll, 1991), p. 79

human approaches to Truth are many. No single person and or single religion can have a full grasp of the Truth.

For this reason, Truth is dialogical. Truth is greater than our human understanding of Truth, because it is transcendental; it is fuller than our understanding of Truth. Dialogue must start with a spirit of openness and humility. There must be an acknowledgment that dialogical partners have only a partial grasp of the Truth. However, the more religious people are involved in dialogue on the basis of Truth, the clearer their perceptions will become, for Truth will lead them to newer and broader understandings.

2. Dialogue on the Basis of Scripture

A comparative study of other religious scriptures and traditions played a vital role in Gandhi's life. Scriptures and the practice of Truth and non-violence were the sources of his knowledge of other faiths. For Gandhi, scriptures were not merely vehicles binding cultures and traditions. Their role was to make the life of the community meaningful in the context of their own unique and foundational experience in reference to goal of human life: self-realization. Scriptures, therefore, are supportive of moral values and promote quality of life. The essential and fundamental teaching of all religious scriptures is the same, Truth and non-violence.

As Truth is revealed in all religious scriptures, Gandhi firmly believed that it is the sacred duty of every cultured man and woman to study sympathetically the scriptures of the world. Ignorance of others' religions creates prejudice, fanaticism, conflict, exploitation, oppression and results in violence and terrorism. But when people study the scriptures of other religions reverently, they come to know the Truth and the Truth frees them of ill-will towards others. This study enables persons to grow in respect, tolerance, understanding and acceptance and leads people, finally, to dialogue for peaceful co-existence.

Often it is thought that study of other's religious scriptures may weaken our own faith, but Gandhi strongly opposed this view, saying,

The Hindu system of philosophy regards all religions as containing the elements of truth in them and enjoins an attitude of respect and reverence towards them all. This of course, presupposes regards for one's own religion. Study and appreciation of other religions

need not cause a weakening of that regard; it should mean extension of that regard to other religions.³⁰

In pluralistic societies, Gandhi's practical suggestion for sympathetic study of other's scriptures is a unique contribution in the area of inter-religious dialogue. Regarding this practical suggestion, Rev. Dr. Nirmal Minz, a staff member of the Lutheran Theological College in Ranchi explains,,

To our knowledge, no other practical programme of this kind has ever been presented or even discussed by people engaged in a formal Hindu-Christian dialogue in India today.³¹

In his ashram in India, Gandhi utilized inter-religiously structured prayer services. Passages were read from different religious scriptures and songs were sung that were more ecumenical in spirit. Once Gandhi asked Kaka Saheb, his learned disciple: "Today in the ashram, the majority are Hindus. If it were not like that and if Christians or Mussalmans were in majority, what would have been the form of our ashram prayers?" Kaka Saheb replied, "Just as we have taken verses from different religions, similarly we would have had selections from their prayers, too." Gandhi added,

Not merely that; we would have kept in the place of the Gita, the Koran or the Bible. Our ashram is not of a single religion. It is of all religions. The environment should be conducive to all. This is the meaning of "reverence for all *dharma*", *sarva-dharma-sama-bhava*.³²

Gandhi strongly believed that all scriptures were divinely inspired, and had come to us through human mediation. None came from God directly. Moreover, scriptures had been revealed within context—a particular time of history, a particular culture and situation. For these reasons, a correct interpretation of scripture is very important. In order to find the Truth in the scripture reading, one has to use both faith and reason. Reason has to cooperate with faith or reason has to be at the service of faith. Gandhi wrote,

30. *Young India*, December 6, 1928

31. Nirmal Minz, "Gandhiji and the formal Hindu-Christian dialogue", *Religion and Society*, Vol. XVI, No.3, (Sept., 1969), p. 37

32. *Young India*, August 25, 1920, *Quoted in Mahatma Gandhi and comparative Religion*, p. 88

The seat of religious authority lies within. I exercise my judgment about every scripture including the Gita. I cannot let a scriptural text supersede my reason. Whilst I believe that the principal books are inspired, they suffer from a process of double distillation. Firstly, they come through a human prophet, and then through the commentaries of interpreters. Nothing in them comes from God directly. Mathew may give one version of one text and John may give another. I cannot surrender my reason while I subscribe to divine revelation. And above all, 'the letter killeth, the spirit giveth life' (2 Cor. 3:6).³³

Swami Vivekananda had a similar view of scriptures. He also found infinite truth in all religious scriptures. He believed it is a person's openness of heart that accepts and respects the truth of other religious scriptures. He wrote,

The Bible, the Vedas, the Koran, and all other sacred books are so many pages, and an infinite number of pages remain yet to be unfolded. I shall leave my heart open for all of them."³⁴

It is not only Hindu religion and philosophy that accept truth from other religious scriptures, but Buddhism, Christianity and Islam do so as well. Buddha taught his disciples to follow the Truth with proper understanding, no matter its source. Christianity rejects nothing that is holy and is open to the truth in other religions. Islam not only affirms that there is truth in every religion, but that all religions are true.³⁵ Reverence, therefore, for all religious scriptures and their sympathetic study lead us to Truth and this Truth becomes the basis for meaningful dialogue.

3. Dialogue on the Basis of the Prophets

All religions have their own prophets and seers. Believers have deep faith in their prophets, seers and sages. These prophets and their messages are universal and for the whole of humanity. Gandhi viewed them as the teachers of mankind. They occupied a higher

33. Harijan, December 5, 1936, *Quoted in Mahatma Gandhi and Comparative Religion*, p. 126

34. Swamy Nikhilananda (ed), *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, (New York: R.V. Center, 1953), p.386, *Quoted in Mahatma Gandhi and Comparative Religion*, p. 60

35. Dr. K. G. Saiyidain, *Islam, The Religion of Peace*, (New Delhi: Islam and the Modern Age Society, 1976), p. 69

place in human history because of the service they had rendered to humanity.³⁶

The world recognizes the outstanding contributions of Buddha and Muhammad, the founders of Buddhism and Islam. Gandhi and other Indian thinkers viewed Jesus as a prophet of God. Some Buddhists have spoken of Jesus as the Buddha of the West. The Holy Koran speaks of Jesus as Messiah or as a prophet and messenger of God. All of these prophets have influenced the lives of millions of people around the world and have uplifted human life. Respect for these prophets and their universal messages provides a basis for inter-religious dialogue.

However, Christianity makes the claim that Jesus was not only a prophet but also the only son of God. Gandhi did not interpret Jesus in an inclusive way, but in a comprehensive way. He did this in order to credit Jesus with universality and humanity. Christianity's exclusive claim regarding Jesus did not matter much to Gandhi. As a prophet and universal teacher, Jesus' life and message were more important to him. Gandhi wrote,

...To His believers, He was God's begotten son. Could the fact that I do or do not accept this belief make Jesus have any more or less influence in my life? Is all the grandeur of His teaching and of His doctrine to be forbidden to me? I cannot believe so. To me it implies a spiritual birth. My interpretation, in other words, is that in Jesus' own life is the key of His nearness to God; that He expressed, as no other could, the spirit and will of God.³⁷

As Dr. Radhakrishnan has said, "All religions owe their inspiration to the personal insights of their prophets and founders."³⁸ These prophets and seers of different religions had unique experiences of and with the Ultimate Truth. They communicated their unique, holy and spiritual experience to their followers, influencing the lives of others. While these prophets made unique contributions in religion, they themselves were not religion. It is believed that they were sent

36. *Gandhi on Christianity*, p. 23

37. *Ibid.*, p. 27

38. Radhakrishnan, S., *An Idealist View of Life*, (George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1951), p. 89, Quoted in *Mahatma Gandhi and Comparative Religion*, p. 52

by God to show humanity the way to God, purify religion and to uplift human life. Dr. K. G. Saiyidain explains,

In fact, the whole purpose of God in sending His numerous messengers to men and women has been to purify their hearts, to teach them to strive for knowledge and wisdom and to make them more aware of what the *Qur'an* calls, "God's signs" to reflect on them. Purity of heart is certainly important for man's salvation but it is not enough; it has to be supplemented with growth in knowledge and wisdom without which he cannot order his worldly life wisely and properly.³⁹

Islamic philosopher Abdul Hashim wrote in his book *The Creed of Islam*, that Muslim commentators hesitate to accept Gautama Buddha as a Prophet on the grounds that non-Semitic prophets are not specifically mentioned in the Holy *Qur'an* and that the teachings of Buddha, as now presented, do not acknowledge the existence of God. In contradiction to these claims Hashim argues that there is no room for prejudice in Islam. In his view, Buddha is also a prophet because he attained 'Nirvana' under a fig tree, just as the Holy Prophet Muhammad received His first revelation and commission of prophethood in the cave on Mount Hira, in Mecca. He went further to say, "Like every other prophet, Gautama Buddha repudiated the religious order prevailing at the time of his advent."⁴⁰

Hindu scripture also teaches that *avatars* (Gods incarnate) are sent to the world to uphold *Dharma*. According to the *Bhagavad-Gita*: "Whenever *dharma* declines and *adharma* gets the ascendancy, O Bharata, I create Myself to uphold *dharma* again and again." (*Bhagavad-Gita*, IV: 7). Jesus also taught His disciples to accept and respect the prophets and God's messengers as he said, "Whoever welcomes God's messenger because he is God's messenger, will share in his reward" (Mt. 10: 41).

So, it is; prophets and seers are sent by God (Truth) to direct people toward the Truth. They do this through their words and lived example. Their words and lives are universal, being for all human

39. *Islam, The Religion of Peace*, p. 86

40. Abul Hashim, *The Creed of Islam*, (Dhaka: Bangladesh Co-operative Book Society, 1997), p.63

beings. This becomes the basis for dialogue among different religions and the creation of the common Brotherhood of man.

D. Inter-Religious Dialogue based on *Ahimsa*

As a politician, social reformer, and religious leader, the originality of Gandhi's philosophy was best expressed in his theory and practice of non-violence. No one in history has applied this principle of non-violence as widely as Gandhi did. He recognized that his views on *Ahimsa* were the result of his integration of his study of most of the faiths of the world into his life. *Ahimsa* was the creed of his life; he believed in the religion of non-violence.

He believed that non-violence is a perfect state and that it was the goal toward which all humankind moved. Man is perfected only when he lives in the society as a non-violent person. Gandhi held that, "Non-violence is the law of our species as violence is the law of the brute".⁴¹ According to Gandhi, in our present state we are partly men and partly beasts. So, we are non-violent in our human nature, but violent in our animal nature.

Every religion teaches us to be non-violent and to avoid violence. Defining religion, Swami Vivekananda said, "Religion is the idea which is raising the brute unto man, and man unto God".⁴² Thus, true practice of non-violence makes men God-like, because the nature of God is essentially non-violent. All religious scriptures describe God's nature as loving and compassionate.

According to Gandhi, Truth is the goal and *Ahimsa* is the means. There is no means of realizing truth in human relationships except through the practice of *Ahimsa*. The very practice of *Ahimsa*, of relating to others in everyday life, is dialogue in the truest sense of the word. When *Ahimsa* is practiced Truth follows as the natural end. Gandhi said,

But ahimsa being the means, we are naturally more concerned with it in our everyday life. It is ahimsa, therefore, that our masses have

41. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 112

42. Swami Lokeshwarananda (ed), *Swami Vivekananda: His Life and Message*, (Calcutta: The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1994), p. 11

to be educated in. Education in truth follows from it as a natural end.⁴³

Gandhi's concept of truth as basis for inter-religious dialogue embodies an orderly, stable, and permanent reality. His concept of non-violence stands for the dynamic, changing and emerging aspect of reality's truth. Gandhi, through his philosophy of Truth and non-violence, envisioned and spoke concretely and abstractly on the particular and universal dimension of the reality in which inter-religious dialogue takes place.

In Gandhi's view truth and *Ahimsa* are convertible terms and, for this reason, end and means are the same, like two sides of the same coin. If the aim of dialogue is to know the truth and to live harmoniously, it then presupposes non-violent means. Non-violence is the basis and the means for meaningful dialogue for peace and harmony.

1. Dialogue on the Basis of Common Values

Gandhi explained his concept of *Ahimsa* or non-violence both in the negative and the positive form. Negatively, *Ahimsa* means non-killing, non-hurting, non-injuring other beings in thoughts, words and deeds. In its positive form, Gandhi said, "*ahimsa* means the largest love, the greatest charity."⁴⁴ *Ahimsa* also means self-suffering. As an essential attribute of God, *Ahimsa* includes many other values, which are common to all religions. These common values best express the spirit of *Ahimsa*. A meaningful inter-religious dialogue can be promoted on the basis of these common values.

a. Tolerance

Tolerance is a common value of all the major religions. According to Arthur Helps, "Tolerance is the only real test of civilization."⁴⁵ Tolerance, in its social aspect, is interconnected with the history of religions and human civilization. Man is religious by nature and experiences the presence of the Holy by revelation or intuition. Man's every experience of the Holy is unique. As man is also a

43. *Harijan*, June 23, 1946, p.199

44. *Young India*, May 5, 1920

45. Dr. S. Ignacimuthu, S.J., *Values for Life*, (Bombay: Better Yourself Books, 1994), p.92

social being and lives in a human society, he has to respect the presence of other religions, cultures, races and perspectives in order to live harmoniously within the wider society.

It is here that one begins to see the role of tolerance toward the presence of others. Tolerance is the capacity to allow or to respect the beliefs or behavior of others, which differ from one's own. The rationality of tolerance is understandable only when a believer of one religious tradition is capable to encounter the believers of another religious tradition with proper respect, appreciating the culture and customs of another faith tradition. It cultivates and prompts a spirit of interaction, dialogue and communion.

Tolerance is the prerequisite for interpersonal relationships and harmonious community living. Gandhi strove to promote a spirit of tolerance among peoples of different faiths on the basis of non-violence. He truly believed,

I should love all men- not only in India but in the world- belonging to the different faiths, to become better people by contact with one another, and if that happens the world will be a much better place to live in than it is today. I plead for the broadest toleration, and I am working to that end. I ask people to examine every religion from the point of the religionists themselves. I do not expect the India of my dream to develop one religion, i.e., to be wholly Hindu or wholly Christian, or wholly Mussalman; but I want it to be wholly tolerant, with its religions working side by side with one another.⁴⁶

If everyone was religiously tolerant, the world would certainly be a better place. Civil unrest, mass murder and genocide would be greatly reduced. Thus, tolerance becomes a necessary first step in a dialogical process for peaceful and harmonious living in pluralistic societies.

Religious tolerance does not require accepting everything in other religions as true, but it does require accepting other religions as different or unique. These differences or uniqueness should not be the cause of intolerance and opposition.

For religious moderates and liberals, religious tolerance means allowing others to pursue their own religious beliefs and practices

46. *Gandhi on Christianity*, p. 59

freely, without discrimination or oppression. This includes the freedom to change one's own religion and to proselytize others. But in practicing tolerance, one should not compromise with evil. Gandhi insisted,

My doctrine of toleration does not include toleration of evil, though it does the toleration of the evil-minded. It does not, therefore, mean that you have to invite each and every one who is evil-minded to tolerate a false faith.⁴⁷

By false faith Gandhi meant a faith in which the sum total of its energy was not directed for good.

According to Thomas Aykara, there are four different attitudes toward religion in the present world: a) Religious indifferentism, b) Religious fanaticism; c) Religious co-existence; and d) Religious co-consciousness. Religious indifferentism and religious fanaticism are not proper attitudes for dialogue; rather, they create obstacles for dialogue. Fundamentalism, secularism, communalism and prejudice are also obstacles to dialogue. While religious, tolerant people do not hold that religious indifference and fanaticism necessarily lead to intolerance, they do recognize that all religions value tolerance as leading to dialogue.⁴⁸

b. Respect for Dharma (Religion)

Gandhi's study of religions led him to accept the best of all religions and to formulate the concept of *sarva-dharma-samabhava*, which means looking at all religions with an equal eye. Respect for *dharma* and its faithful practice lead people to be united, because for Gandhi "religions are not for separating men from one another, they are meant to bring them together."⁴⁹ From Gandhi's perspective, a person's religion is like that person's own mother. The person's religion, therefore, deserves the highest respect. Thus, it follows that respect for religion also expresses the proper attitude one should have in regards to a follower of another religion: tolerant respectfulness. The possibility of dialogue is fostered by such an attitude.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 57

48. Thomas Aykara, "Religious as Integration of Life," *Journal of Dharma*, No.8, (1983), p. 336.

49. M. K. Gandhi, *All Religions are True*, p. 228

Respect for religion does not mean that all religions have equal value for all people. Nor does it make people indifferent to all religions. Respect for religion means to cherish the religiosity expressed in each religious tradition. Gandhi said of himself, "For me, all the principal religions are equal in the sense that they are all true. They are supplying a felt want in the spiritual progress of humanity."⁵⁰

For Gandhi, respect for religion was much more than co-existence or toleration of other religions. Of course, toleration is the first step towards dialogue, but he gave a much broader and deeper meaning to tolerance. For him tolerance was the positive recognition of all great religions of the world. This implied unreserved freedom of thought and worship and encouraged friendship and harmony through dialogue. Gandhi wrote,

I have, of course, always believed in the principle of religious tolerance. But I have even gone further. I have advanced from tolerance to equal respect of all religions.⁵¹

According to the teaching of the *Qur'an*, there are two main principles for any inter-religious dialogue. The first principle is one derived from the following verse of the *Qur'an*: "Say: O people of book, let us come to a word common to us and you that we will worship none but God" (3:64). This principle inspires people to peaceful co-existence. The second principle, pragmatic reason, is stated in the following verse, "To you your religion and to me mine" (109:6). In a pluralistic society, sometimes it is difficult to find an ideological basis, or common ground, for a solution to religious disagreements. When this occurs, practical co-existence must be adopted on the basis of the second principle. Both of these principles, found in the *Qur'an*, inspire people to respect religions. This tolerant respect ultimately becomes the basis for dialogue.

People tend to think in terms of inferiority and superiority with regards to religion. Lack of respect for religion, especially the religions of others, is *Himsa*. *Himsa* leads people to fanaticism, fundamentalism, conflict and other forms of external violent action.

50. *Harijan*, April 6, 1939

51. *Ibid.*, January 12, 1947

In the name of religion, people attack and destroy churches, mosques and temples. In 1924, Gandhi wrote in “Young India,”

The law of retaliation we have been trying since the day of Adam and we know from experience that it has hopelessly failed. We are groaning under its poisonous effect. Above all, the Hindus may not break mosques against temples. That way lies slavery and worse. Even though a thousand temples may be reduced to bits, I would not touch a single mosque and expect thus to prove the superiority of my faith to the so-called faith of fanatics... Hindus will not defend their religion or their temple by seeking to destroy mosques and thus proving themselves as fanatical as the fanatics who are desecrating temples.⁵²

Without faith in God (Truth), it is impossible to practice non-violence, as Gandhi said, “A living faith in non-violence is impossible without a living faith in God...”⁵³ He further added, “Consciousness of the living presence of God within one is undoubtedly the first requisite.”⁵⁴ As a person reaches the heart of his own religion, he discovers other religions to be as respectful as his own. True respect for religions will not lead people to use religion for selfish purposes, nor will it lead people to be violent toward those of other faiths.

c. Compassion and Love

Compassion and love are also universal values that are common to all religions. For the theistic religions, compassion and love are important attributes of God. Though Buddhism is silent on some metaphysical questions, Buddha himself was a compassionate man and taught his followers to be compassionate to all living beings. Jesus Christ taught belief in a compassionate God. He said, “Be compassionate as your heavenly Father is compassionate” (Mt.5:48). The Holy Quran also teaches God as compassionate as it is written, “He who does not show compassion to his fellow men is undeserving of God’s compassion.”⁵⁵

52. *Young India*, August 28, 1924

53. *Harijan*, June 18, 1938

54. *Ibid.*, June 29, 1947

55. *Islam, A Religion of Peace*, p. 162

Ahimsa is an expression of love and compassion. According to Gandhi, the principle of *ahimsa* “is hurt by every evil thought, by undue haste, by lying, by hatred, by wishing it to anybody. It is also violated by our holding on to what the world needs.”⁵⁶ As compassion is at the basis of *Ahimsa*, every nonviolent action must be free from hatred or any other form of ill-will. Those who hold opposite views, opinions, and beliefs must be treated with goodwill, respect and sympathy. The believers of *Ahimsa* must to be ready to accept suffering for this cause without any feeling of anger or hatred towards opponents. Gandhi called *Ahimsa* a weapon of self-suffering or self-sacrifice. The culture of *Ahimsa* requires the capacity of self-suffering and sacrifice to develop fearlessness to fight against wickedness without taking retaliation. The aim is the conversion of the evil-doer without either hating or hurting him or her. If the people of all religions are inspired by the spirit of compassion and love according to the teachings for their own faith, there will be a positive change in the perception of other religions and this will lead people to inter-religious dialogue for peaceful co-existence in the society.

d. Justice and Religious Freedom

Justice and freedom are also essential and universal values, which all religions promote. These are also attributes of God. Any social, political, economic or religious injustice is an act of *Himsa*. Nonviolent societies, politics, economies and religions always promote justice for all. Justice upholds the rights of all people and allows everyone to live in freedom and equality of opportunity. It strives to promote the common good, never appropriating privileges for self at the expense of others. Justice does not discriminate between caste, creed or color. Rather, it promotes harmony and peace in the society. When people do not receive equal treatment or become victims of injustice because of color, creed or caste, they live in fear and become exclusive, distancing themselves from other religious communities. Gandhi dreamt of an India where everyone would enjoy equal rights, opportunities and where no

56. M.K. Gandhi, *Truth is God*, (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1959), p. 32

particular religion would enjoy favoritism from the State. Gandhi wrote,

If a minority in India, minority on the score of its religious profession, is made to feel small on that account, I can only say that this India is not the India of my dream. In the India for whose fashioning I have worked all my life, everyman enjoys equality of status whatever his religion is. The State is bound to be wholly secular. I go so far to say that no denominational educational institution in it should enjoy State patronage.⁵⁷

When the state is secular in nature and guarantees justice for all men, everyone can enjoy religious freedom. Each one can determine his or her own faith and creed and can associate with others to organize with them for religious purposes. Of course, religious freedom is one of the basic human rights declared by the United Nations. If this declaration were implemented in all nations, religious fanaticism and fundamentalism would be reduced; people would be open to each other's faith, creating an atmosphere for inter-religious dialogue.

Justice and freedom are not just concepts exclusive to a particular religion, but exist in all religions. Non-violence is not a resignation from the fight against wickedness, but an active force in the fight against injustice. All major religions need to be more aware of systematic injustices, which cause suffering in the world. Taking up collaborative ministry in work for justice and freedom, leaders of different religions can be more effective agents of change and transformation. Inter-religious dialogue is an essential component of this collaborative ministry and an effective means in the work for justice and freedom.

e. Respect for Life

An essential aspect of the creed of non-violence is respect for all life. According to the teaching of all religions, life is sacred because it belongs to God. Particularly in Hindu, Buddhist and Jain traditions, human life is regulated by the law of birth and rebirth; to harm or to kill life is, therefore, a serious crime. Gandhi had a great respect for

57. U.S. Mohan Rao (Ed), *The Message of Mahatma Gandhi*, (Ahmedabad: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Government of India, 1968), p. 73

human life. He separated man from his deeds. For him it was proper to attack any evil or unjust system but not its author, because to harm a being was to harm its creator. Gandhi wrote,

Man and his deed are two distinct things. It is quite proper to resist and attack a system, but to resist and attack its author is tantamount to resisting and attacking oneself. For we are all tarred with the same brush, and are children of one and the same Creator, and as such the divine powers within us are infinite. To slight a single human being is to slight those divine powers, and thus to harm not only that being but with him the whole world.⁵⁸

Gandhi's respect for all life was highly influenced by Jainism, as well as by the Hindu belief that all life is one. Gandhi stressed the sacredness of life and the necessity to respect life, be it the life of plants, animals or humans, because of his understanding of every life as part of the divine nature. Gandhi's non-violence was not merely showing mercy to all living creatures, but rather, it laid emphasis on the sacredness of human life in particular.⁵⁹ Gandhi understood the existence of hatred, violence, fanaticism, and the taking of lives through murder as all signs of disrespecting human life. He claimed that true respect for life, on the other hand, brought people together, promoted openness to others, allowing them to recognize and appreciate the differences in religious beliefs and practices, inspiring people to enter into sincere dialogue.

f. Communion and Brotherhood

The concepts of communion and brotherhood express that we are all brothers and sisters under the common Fatherhood of God. All human beings belong to same human family and we share a common human nature. Brotherhood also recognizes human rights and obligations toward society. It cultivates love and respect for all people and works for the common good of the society. It also promotes equal opportunity for all, expresses concern for those suffering and takes steps to eradicate misery and suffering. Brotherhood seeks reconciliation and brings about unity and harmony in diversity.

58. *All Men are Brothers*, p. 80

59. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 429

The vision of Gandhi's Brotherhood is inclusive and therefore universal. He found there is unity in the diverse nature of reality. Gandhi held that religions are a part of the natural law given to human beings in order to realize this fundamental unity. Gandhi wrote in "Young India,"

In nature, there is a fundamental unity running through all the diversity we see about us. Religions are no exception to the natural law. They are given to mankind so as to accelerate the process of realization of fundamental unity.⁶⁰

Gandhi's view of Brotherhood did not exist on the conceptual level. Rather, he worked tirelessly for its realization. "*Sarvodaya*" or welfare of all beings is the Hindu doctrine that Gandhi scrupulously followed to create the Brotherhood of man. His *Sarvodaya* or universal welfare was based on two principles, truth and love.

Cardinal Karol Wojtyla (the future Pope John Paul II), in his book "Acting Person" talked about communion and community. According to him, solidarity, opposition and dialogue are the authentic attitudes for communal life. Solidarity is the participative attitude, which renders the person constantly ready to accept and realize his share in the community for the common good. Solidarity also implies that one respect his or her duties and responsibilities toward others, and understands the mutual complementariness which forms an intrinsic part of participation and fulfillment. Cardinal Karol Wojtyla looked at opposition in a positive way, which was not contradictory to solidarity, but based on a more adequate understanding of the common good. Constructive opposition was seen as being both beneficial and required by the common good and participation. Wojtyla held that dialogue is the attitude that establishes and keeps balance between solidarity and opposition in a community experiencing conflict and strain. Karol Wojtyla wrote,

Dialogue, in fact, without evading the strains, the conflicts, or the strife manifest in the life of various human communities takes up what is right and true in these differences, what may become a source of good for men. Consequently, it seems that in a constructive communal life the principle of dialogue has to be

60. *Young India*, August 20, 1925

adopted regardless of the obstacles and difficulties that it may bring with it along the way.⁶¹

According to Abul Hashim, the universal Brotherhood Islam preaches is a classless society, which is not created by struggles but by active faith in the Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of man. This Brotherhood is made possible by the elimination of class ego, class consciousness and by the coordinated function for the common good.⁶²

The communion and Brotherhood that all religions promote implies shared participation, solidarity and a expressed commitment to enhance the common good in the society. Dialogue becomes an important means to realize this mission of all religions.

2. Dialogue and Higher Spiritual Perfection

Both truth and *Ahimsa* are divine attributes and their practice brings men to higher spiritual perfection. One who reaches higher spiritual perfection realizes the spirit that is identical in all beings; this person sees unity in diversity in and beyond the world. The religion of non-violence is the only way to higher spiritual perfection. The great religious teachers of the world practiced this religion of non-violence and reached the highest spiritual perfection. For this reason they are acknowledged as universal teachers and their message is also universal. Their message is about the Truth expressed in a nonviolent way. Buddha, Jesus and Mohammad reached higher perfection in this life. They belong to the universe and their message is universal: Vedic taught “Do not injure any being”; The Buddha taught, “Let man overcome anger by love; let him overcome evil by good; let him overcome greed by liberality, the liar by truth”; Jesus taught, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you” (Lk. 6:27); Prophet Mohammad taught, “He who digs a pit for his brother man falls into it himself.”⁶³

In essence, all of these great men taught non-violence as a means to pursue Truth (God). A person who reaches higher spiritual

61. Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, (London: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979), p. 287

62. *The Creed of Islam*, p.102-103

63 *Mahatma Gandhi and Comparative Religion*, p. 65-66

perfection can realize the essential teaching of all religions is one and the same. For this reason Gandhi said, "If a man reaches the heart of his own religion, he has reached the heart of others, too."⁶⁴

It is not only the external rituals and animal sacrifices that bring spiritual perfection but also the practice of non-violence in loving service to humanity. Gandhi himself reached towards spiritual perfection through his practice of rituals, self-purification, self-suffering, mortification, and loving service to humanity. Gandhi further wrote,

I must go through more self-purification and sacrifice, before I can hope to save these lambs from this unholy sacrifice. Today I think I must die pining for this self-purification and sacrifice.⁶⁵

The essential aim of religions is to perfect men spiritually and morally. True spiritual perfection comes through the sincere practice of religion which makes people open-minded and inspires them to enter into dialogue with people of other faith traditions. While the externals aspect of religion may separate people, the spiritual dimension of religion unites all human beings.

3. Dialogue on the Basis of Our Commonality

While we live in a multi-religious or multi-cultural society, we share many things in common. We share a common nature, origin, and destination, and are bounded by common moral and spiritual values. According to Gandhi unity through dialogue had to be promoted on the basis of our commonality. He wrote,

What does unity consist in and how can it be best promoted? The answer is simple. It consists in our having a common purpose, a common goal and common sorrows. It is best promoted by co-operation to reach the common goal, by sharing one another's sorrows and by mutual toleration.⁶⁶

As we share a common nature, origin and destiny, we likewise face common challenges, problems and sorrows. In order to respond to these common challenges and to make our world a better place,

64. *The Message of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 40

65. M.K. Gandhi, *Autobiography, The Story of MY Experiment with Truth*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1983), p. 208

66. *Young India*, February 25, 1920

people of all faith traditions are needed to come together in making coordinated and integrated efforts through dialogue. Paul John Paul II shared this view while he was addressing different religious leaders in Assisi in 1986.

Yes, we all hold that conscience and obedience to the voice of conscience is an essential element on the road toward a better and peaceful world. Could it be otherwise, since all men and women in this world have a common nature, a common origin and a common destiny? If there are many and important differences among us, there is also a common ground, where to operate together in the solution of this dramatic challenge of our age: true peace or catastrophic war? (John Paul II, Assisi, 1986)

The common source and refuge of all mankind is religion. Religions hold more in common--beliefs that unite, than they have differences that separate. In themselves, religions are not the cause of conflict between people. Nor is the God who revealed religions the cause of problems. Rather it is the ignorant (mis)interpretation of human beings that causes opposition and conflict. Dialogue on the basis of our commonality promotes unity in diversity. It helps to recognize religious differences not as oppositions but as unique contributions of the respective religions.

4. Non-violent Means for Dialogue

Gandhi practiced his religion through the exercise of prayer, fasting and social service. At the same time, these three practices were also important means for his inter-religious dialogue.

a. Prayer

Gandhi believed in the power of prayer. He prayed personally, as well as communally. According to Gandhi prayer is not just asking. It is a dialogue of the devout soul with the Divine; it uplifts the will of man in touch with the Divine will. Gandhi experienced prayer life-giving. He declared, "Prayer has been the saving of my life." Stressing the importance of prayer, Gandhi further said, "In fact, food for the body is not so necessary as prayer for the soul."⁶⁷

Gandhi spent a good amount of time in silent prayer especially in times of crisis. He also gave importance to community prayer, which

67. *Ibid.*, September 21, 1926

helped him to eradicate egotism, self-centeredness and aided him to break down barriers among and between human beings. Prayer raises the needs that are common to all human beings, expresses longed for friendship and brotherhood, and promotes justice and peace. While advising a student regarding community prayer, Gandhi shared,

A congregational prayer is a mighty thing. What we do not often do alone, we do together. Unconscious effect cannot be resisted. Are there not boys who at the commencement of their career were scoffers but who subsequently became mighty believers in the efficacy of congregational prayer? It is common experience of men who have no robust faith to seek the comfort of congregational prayer. All who flock to the churches, temples, or mosques are not scoffers or humbugs. They are often honest men and women. For them, congregational prayer is like a daily bath, a necessity of their existence. These places of worship are not a mere idle superstition to be swept away at the first opportunity. They have survived all attacks up to now and are likely to persist to the end of time.⁶⁸

Gandhi truly believed that communion comes from common worship. He also held that the promotion of inter-religious prayer was an essential aspect of higher cultural and spiritual life. In creating a sense of unity, love and respect for the faith of others, inter-religious prayer is very helpful. It also inspires people to work together for the common good and for a peaceful society. One of the best examples of an inter-religious prayer meeting was the gathering of world religious leaders in praying for peace in Assisi in 1986.

b. Fasting

Non-violence is selfless love, which is impossible without purity of mind and body. Fasting and prayer increase self-discipline and self-sacrifice. Fasting was one of the most powerful means undertaken by Gandhi for penance and self-purification. Fasting is very important for one who wants to apply non-violent methodology in his life.

Gandhi applied fasting as a means to promote social, political and religious reform. In 1924, Gandhi fasted for 21 days for Hindu-Muslim unity. He also fasted in Calcutta in August, 1947 and in Delhi January, 1948 to end rioting and promote communal harmony

68. *Ibid.*, September 23, 1926

.⁶⁹ But Gandhi warned that fasting should not be done out of selfishness, anger, lack of faith and/or impatience. Rather it should come out of one's living faith in God and from the depth of one's soul.⁷⁰ Gandhi also believed that fasting purified political and economic agendas provided it is used in the proper way. For Gandhi, fasting should be undertaken as a last resort when all other means have been exhausted and proved wanting.

Fasting is prescribed in all religions as a means of self purification and an avenue to increase spiritual power. All fasting may not be successful, indeed Gandhi's fasting was not entirely successful, but it may bring about a miraculous inner change and soul-force within a person.

c. Social service

True prayer leads people to the service of humanity. Gandhi strongly believed that the way of action is the way of service and the way of service is the way to God. He articulated this conviction in the following words, "I am endeavouring to see God through service of humanity, for I know that God is neither in heaven, or down below, but in every one."⁷¹

Gandhi did not view society as divided into watertight compartments. He viewed human life and society in all its diversity and multiplicity. He offered his service to everyone regardless of caste and creed. His service was the expression of his dialogue of life and action with all human beings. His dialogue of life and action were best expressed in the concept of '*Sarvodaya*', which means 'well-being' and the 'goodness of all.' Gandhi received the insight of '*Sarvodaya*' from the teaching Gita, but his service went beyond Hindu religion. For Gandhi, one may be inspired to serve by his or her own religious faith, but a person's service actually goes beyond one's own religion. When this service is non-violent and becomes a dialogue of life and action, it reaches to the truth and bears the fruits of unity and harmony.

69. *Religion, Morality and Politics According to Mahatma Gandhi*, p.71

70. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p.184

71. *Ibid.*, p. 52

Mahatma Gandhi was truly a religious person. His philosophy was derived from the principles of spiritual and moral unity. *Satyagraha* and *Ahimsa* were his two unwavering principles. Gandhi understood *Ahimsa* as an essential means of a person's endeavor to reach the Truth. The fruits of this endeavor are unity, harmony and peace. *Ahimsa* was Gandhi's journey and his invitation to our religiously, pluralistic world. The mission of his life was to bring relationship among the people of different faiths through non-violence. Through the non-violent means of inter-religious dialogue he offered the possibilities of unity, harmony and peace to interfaith communities and groups. For Gandhi this peace among religions was not possible without dialogue based on Truth and non-violence.

II. INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN THE PROMOTION OF PEACE AND HARMONY

A. Meaning of Peace and Harmony

The Greek word for peace is '*eirene*' which primarily means the opposite of war. However, other visions of peace are more complex. The Hebrew word for peace is '*shalom*' which means not only the absence of war but well-being and prosperity. It also refers to material and spiritual conditions, which when joined together, make harmonious relationships visible in social life and between nations. The Arabic word for peace is '*salam*' which has been used as a greeting since the time of the *Qur'an*. The Sanskrit word for peace is '*santih*' which viewed peace both positively and negatively in relation to personal and social life; it refers to tranquility, quiet, calmness of mind, absence of passion, aversion to pain and indifference to the object of pleasure and pain.

The concept of peace is not easy to define as it can vary from culture to culture and religion to religion. In a negative sense, religious traditions describe peace as a state of freedom from war, violence, unrest, quarrelling and worry. But in reality, peace is more than just freedom from war and violence. Today those who advocate peace have reached an agreement that the opposite of peace is not war. In other words, peace is not just the absence of war or merely the absence of violence, though the absence of violence is a precondition to attain peace. In its positive form, peace is viewed as

peace of mind, serenity, friendliness, harmony and tranquility, communion and brotherhood of men. In a pluralistic society, peace is the fruit of justice; it is living a meaningful life with right relationships between humankind and God, between and among human beings, and between human beings and other creatures. It is among other things, also viewed as wholeness, completeness, and being full and perfect.

The literal meaning of harmony is oneness, peace, accord, unanimity, etc. According to George Olivera, in the pluralistic society, harmony is the product of people who are striving to resolve their cultural, religious and language differences by means of co-existence and recognition of the existence of others, through the mutual sharing of views and opinions in regular dialogue and with mutual co-operation. The aim of this process is to gradually reach a desired level of harmony and peace in the society in the spirit of tolerance.⁷²

Peace and harmony are interchangeable words, where there is peace there is harmony and where there is harmony there peace exists. From the time of Greek thinkers Socrates, Plato and Aristotle all the way to the present day, philosophers have viewed the ideal man and society in terms of happiness, peace and harmony for they are descriptive of the end of all human beings. According to Plato, desired harmony cannot be attained in the world of appearance but resides only in the ideal world. For Aristotle, desired harmony is possible only if men work under the guidance of rightly guided reason for the common good. St. Thomas Aquinas agreed with Aristotle that the ultimate end of all human beings is happiness. However, for St. Thomas, men find this happiness only in God. Aquinas spoke of two types of happiness: imperfect happiness and perfect happiness. Perfect happiness comes from God. He wrote, The happiness of human beings is twofold. There is an imperfect happiness in this life of which Aristotle is speaking, consisting in the contemplation of immaterial substances to which wisdom disposes us, an imperfect contemplation such as is possible

72. *On Toleration: From Theory to Social Praxis*, p.57

in this life, which does not know what such substances are. The other happiness is the perfect happiness of the next life, when we will see the very substance of God himself and the other immaterial substances. But what brings that happiness won't be any theoretical science, but the light of glory.⁷³

As a peace loving person, Gandhi dedicated his whole life to the promotion of peace and harmony. For him, peace did not exist only on the conceptual level; rather, peace was a living experience in lived reality. For this reason he was not so interested to defining peace, but rather spent his energy searching for ways and means in which to make peace a lived reality in his pluralistic society. Gandhi used three expressions to explain the social reality in which peace can be a visible reality.

1. The first term he used was “*Rama-rajya*” which means ‘the kingdom of Rama’ or ‘Kingdom of God’. This refers to a theocentric society, which is ultimately ruled by God. It is the sovereignty of the people based on moral vision. It is the perfect state of perfect harmony reached not through the observance of external laws but through individual perfection. Gandhi also truly believed that ‘*Rama-rajya*’ could not be established only through human efforts, but the final help for its establishment came only from God. As he said, “I know, that all this combined assistance is worthless if I have no other assistance, that is, from God. All is vain without His help. And if He is with this struggle, no other help is necessary.”⁷⁴

2. The second expression Gandhi used to explain the perfect harmonious society was Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven. The New Testament and the book of Leo Tolstoy, *The Kingdom of God is within you*, greatly influenced Gandhi in this regard. He began to realize that God dwells in every human heart. This brought a moral and spiritual consciousness to Gandhi’s search for the Kingdom of God in the human heart through the rendering of service. All during his political struggle he continued to search for the Kingdom of God without losing the moral and spiritual basis for his politics. Gandhi thought that politics was absolute dirt without

73. Norman Melchert, *The Great Conversation, A Historical Introduction to Philosophy*, (California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1999), p. 276.

74. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, (Vol. 43), p. 125

moral and spiritual principles.⁷⁵ Gandhi compared the Kingdom of God with the principle of non-violence. Because non-violence contributes its moral and spiritual strength, to those who employed it, it becomes the most power instrument in establishing the Kingdom of God.

3. The third expression Gandhi used was 'Paradise on Earth'. Gandhi could not recall whether it was on a gate in Delhi or Agra that where he found the phrase: "If there is paradise on earth, it is here, it is here, it is here."⁷⁶ This expression struck Gandhi and led him to work to establish paradise on earth. This paradise was described and understood as harmonious living, in which differences of creed and caste were resolved, bringing equal rights and opportunity for everyone, liberating people from oppression and injustice, and respecting the faiths of all. Through his constructive programs of *Sarvodaya*, *Swaraj* and *Swadeshi*, Gandhi tried to give visible reality to the expression of "Paradise on Earth".

Gandhi held that ultimate happiness, peace and harmony came from God alone, but did not accept that these properties were 'other worldly'; Gandhi emphatically believed that they are of the here and now. Man has to search and work for them. Non-violence is the only means or instrument to bring peace and harmony to the world, without which peace and harmony will remain only a dream. As he said,

Non-violence is a perfect state. It is the goal towards which all mankind moves naturally though unconsciously.... For, highest perfection is unattainable without highest restraint. Suffering is thus the badge of the human tribe.⁷⁷

B. Peace and harmony through religion

In common parlance, the very word 'religion' implies division and diversity. Often we see this religious division and diversity as obstacles to peace and harmony in society. But religion by its very nature is a discipline and an ideology of peace. Religious diversity is

75. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p.102

76. *Ibid.*, p. 360

77. *Mahatma Gandhi: Selected Political Writings*, p. 41

not the cause of opposition and division, but contrary to the expectations of some, it holds a great wealth for peace.

Hinduism, the most ancient religion of the world, offers a philosophy of peace. Its essential teaching is that Truth is one. Different religions are the manifestations of the same Truth. This view of Truth in Hinduism promotes a spirit of mutual co-existence. This is a philosophy of life, which needs to be lived. A great Vedanta philosopher, Swami Vivekananda, offered an important principle: "Follow one, condemn none."⁷⁸ This is another name for peaceful and harmonious living.

Buddhism and Jainism do not believe in a personal God, but their essential teaching is non-violence. The ultimate goal of Buddhism is liberation from suffering and to reach *Nirvana*. *Nirvana* is understood as ineffable peace, perfect calm and full happiness. One can reach *Nirvana* here and now by destroying passion and selfish attachment. Thus, Buddhism is a moral and spiritual journey toward ultimate peace. According to the teaching of Buddha, *Nirvana* can be realized negatively through the practice of non-violence and positively by being compassionate to all living beings.⁷⁹

Christianity is also a religion of peace; it has given great importance to peace and harmony. In the Sermon of the Mount Jesus taught, "Happy are the peace-makers; they shall be called sons of God" (Mt 5:9). Jesus sent his disciples on mission as messengers of peace, "Let your first words be, 'peace to this house!' And if a man of peace lives there, your peace will go and rest on him; if not, it will come back to you" (Lk. 10:5-6). Jesus often offered his disciples greetings of peace. In Christianity peace is also viewed as the fruit of justice and forgiveness. In 2002, Pope John Paul II wrote in his peace message,

To pray for peace is to pray for justice, for a right ordering of relations within and among nations and peoples. It is to pray for freedom, especially for the religious freedom that is a basic human and civil right of every individual. To pray for peace is to seek

78. *Swami Vivekananda: His Life and Message*, p.30

79. Francis Cardinal Arinze, *Religions for Peace, A Call for Solidarity to the Religions of the World*, (New York, Doubleday 2002), p. 21-23

God's forgiveness, and to implore the courage to forgive those who trespassed against us.⁸⁰

Islam is also a religion of peace. One of the most beautiful names of God in the *Qur'an* is peace. One is to live in peace and harmony with the Creator, with other human beings and with the environment, not in the mere submission to the one God alone. Muslims are not to kill others in the name of Islam, but they are to live in total submission to the God of peace in peace.

In our present world Islam is a most misunderstood religion for it is viewed by many as a religion of violence and intolerance. This lack of understanding leads to the perception that Islam is not concerned with peace (a simple fallacy rooted in the fact that some Muslims are involved in violence and terrorist activities in the name of Islam). Those terrorists are killing innocent people of different religions in the name of their own (mis)interpretation of their religion. Here one needs to be clear: Muslims and Islam are two distinct entities. Islam is an ideology and Muslims are people who follow Islam. Muslims are to be judged by Islam, but not Islam by Muslims. Islam and Muslims are not to be equated. Some Muslims do commit violent acts, these acts do cause others to misunderstand and be confused in their thinking about Islam as a religion. However, a close study of the Holy Book of Islam makes clear that Islam is a peace loving religion. The God of the *Qur'an* is the God of peace, mercy and compassion. Islam is a universal order, which inspires the follower to live in peace and harmony with himself, with the community and nature, in this world and also in the world to come.

Even though all religions inspire and promote peace and harmony, sometimes religion becomes the cause of conflict and violence. The existence of violence in the name of religion is not a new phenomena; it has a long history. The Crusades, European religious wars of the past (and present), current Hindu-Muslim violence in India, Jewish-Muslim violence in the Middle-east,

80. John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace: January 1, 2002*, Quoted in "The Just War theory: A Path to Peace? By Fausto B. Gomes, O.P., Theology Week 2003, Faculty of Sacred Theology, UST, Manila, 2003, p. 163

Christian-Muslim violence in the Philippines, Catholic-Protestant violence in Northern Ireland, and terrorist attacks in different parts of the world all remind us how religion can inflict war and violence.

It is also evident that inter-religious violence seldom occurs solely for religious reasons. Rather, most often socio-economic and political reasons lay behind the occurrences of religious violence and conflict. Often ideology is used, misused and abused for political or socio-economic gain and, of course, religions also added their own reasons to justify them.⁸¹

The contribution of religions in human history, however, is beyond doubt. Religions have produced great personalities, provided moral, spiritual and social values for right living, provided tools and means to harmonize the physical with the metaphysical and they have inspired people, in the spirit of compassion and solidarity, to moves of self-sacrifice in the eradication of suffering while pursuing peace and harmony in society. Economics and politics will always be guided by profit and power within social structures. Peace, justice and harmony, however, can only come through religion.

Thus, for world religions to be effective conduits of peace, justice and harmony in the world, they should first be at peace among themselves. Without religious peace there cannot be world peace. A religious people should also realize the importance of the statement of Swami Vivekananda, "The secret of religion lies not in theories but in practice."⁸² Each religion may have beautiful dogmas or doctrines regarding peace and harmony, but the greatness of the religion lies in putting them into practice and working for justice and peace. This will always remain a challenge for religions.

Gandhi lived, worked, fought and died for peace, equality and respect for all human beings, tolerance and respect for all religious faiths and ethnic groups. He strongly believed in the power of religious faith to establish peace and harmony in the world. He believed that religions could be instrumental in bringing forth a world at peace in the future. This optimistic view and belief came

81. Michael Amaladoss, "Religions: Violence or Dialogue", *The Japan Mission Journal*, Vol. 57, No. 2, (2003), p. 76.

82. *Swami Vivekananda: His Life and Message*, p. 34.

from his deep religious faith and his moral and spiritual convictions. He wrote,

I see no poverty in the world of tomorrow, no wars, no revolutions, no bloodshed. And in that world there will be a faith in God greater and deeper than ever in the past. The existence of the world, in a broad sense, depends on religion. All attempts to root it out will fail.⁸³

C. Peace and Harmony through Inter-Religious Dialogue

It is clear, from our discussion so far, that all religions are peace loving and aim at promoting peace and harmony in society; all have the moral and spiritual power to commit themselves for this purpose. It is also true that in order to promote peace and harmony, all religions should work together. One religion alone cannot bring true peace and harmony while being isolated from other religious traditions. Dialogue, therefore, becomes the most appropriate method and mechanism for religious traditions to promote peace and harmony together.

When we talk about inter-religious dialogue, it is clear that it has to be based on Truth and non-violence. The aim of dialogue is to search for truth in other religious traditions and recognize and acknowledge them with respect. Dialogue is likewise a non-violent means to create brotherhood on the basis of compassion, justice and forgiveness. According to George Olivera, dialogue is a pre-requisite in pluralistic societies in the attainment of the common good and tolerance. He wrote,

Dialogue is a pre-requisite in a pluralistic society to foster the spirit of toleration between people of different sects, races, languages and cultures. Constant dialogue between people in a given society fosters communal harmony and strengthens the society bond and directs all people towards mutual co-operation and attainment of common good.⁸⁴

According to Hans Küng, Christian Churches lost much of their credibility during the era of modernity—the time of science and technology, colonialism and imperialism. This was a period when the Christianity encountered other world religions with an intensity

83. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 460

84. *On Toleration: From Theory to Social Praxis*, p. 55.

unseen before. In this postmodern world it is imperative that the dialogue between Christian Churches and other world religions has a broader base than colonialism, imperialism or science.

Dialogue is an important virtue for Küng. It makes men capable of working for peace. The practice of dialogue truly makes man human and failure to dialogue leads man to accept the law of the jungle. Küng makes this clear,

Capacity for dialogue is ultimately a virtue of capacity for peace. Precisely in that respect it is deeply human, because it is aware of the history of its failure. Where dialogues were failed, repressions began; the law of the jungle, the law of the more powerful, the superior, the clever, prevailed. Those who carry on dialogue do not shoot.⁸⁵

Inter-religious dialogue was defined earlier as a method of communication among the followers of different religions directed at mutual understanding and enrichment. People engaging in inter-religious dialogue are religiously strong in their own faith, give witness of what is specific and personal in their religious faith while welcoming the testimonies of others with respect and sympathy. Engaging in inter-religious dialogue, they strive to build communion and brotherhood for peaceful, social living. The following are ways inter-religious dialogue leads to peace and promotes its preservation.

1. Respect and Acceptance of the acts of Religious Pluralism

The world is religiously pluralistic. Among the world's population 33 percent are Christian, 22 percent are Muslim, 15 percent are Hindus, 6 percent are Buddhist, 14 percent are non-religious, and the rest are divided into many other religions.⁸⁶ Once the countries of Europe were considered Christian countries, but now Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus and Buddhists are living there side by side. There is no country where diversity is absent. Within families, places of employment and institutions, diversity is present. This diversity is not bad; rather, it is the manifestation of the same Divine Being or Truth as Gandhi would say. It brings beauty and richness to human life and to the world.

85. *Global Responsibility, In Search of a New World Ethic*, p. 104

86. 2002www.adherents.com

Diversity becomes problematic only when one does not or cannot recognize the existence of the other. As a result this lack of recognition isolates people making it impossible for them to work together to create a better world. Recognition of this pluralism or the existence of other religions is a pre-requisite for dialogue. Through dialogue, respect and acceptance of other religions grows. Respecting and accepting pluralism leads to collaboration, peace, and harmony. Wesley Ariarajah, an inter-faith worker, made a beautiful statement in this regard. He wrote,

Dialogue thus is an attempt to help people to understand and accept the other in their “otherness.” It seeks to make people “at home” with plurality, to develop an appreciation of diversity, and to make those links that may just help them hold together when the whole community is threatened by forces of separation and anarchy.⁸⁷

Sincere dialogue brings people of different faiths together. Through their willingness to share and give a life- witness of their respective faith, they learn to appreciate each other’s faith with respect.

2. Healing Past Memories

One of the most difficult challenges of inter-religious dialogue is painful past memories caused by misunderstanding, misinterpretation, hatred, conflict, communalism, fundamentalism, and war. According to Fethulla Gulen, Muslims often find it difficult to enter into dialogue because many of them believe that Western policies are designed to weaken Muslim power. After reviewing the history of imperialism, colonialism and Western domination, many educated Muslims have come to believe that the West is continuing its thousand year old, systematic aggression against Islam. For this reason, Muslims respond to the Roman Catholic Church’s call for dialogue with considerable suspicion.⁸⁸

Muslims have been persecuted by Christians, Hindus and others. Likewise, non-Muslims have been persecuted by Muslims

87. *Dialogue: Resource Manual for Catholics in Asia*, p. 163.

Rev. Wesley Ariarajah is a Methodist pastor who is also Deputy General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, and oversees the unit on interfaith dialogue.

88. *Advocate of Dialogue*, p. 243

throughout different parts of the world. For example, in 1980, Libyan president, Mummam Qadhafi declared that all Arab Christians had to be converted to Islam because it is a contradiction to be both Arab and Christian.⁸⁹ Muslim fundamentalists, using Islamic ideology have created conflicts and violence in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, the Southern Philippines and Indonesia. Similarly, Hindu fundamentalists have persecuted Muslims, Buddhist and Christians in India and Nepal.⁹⁰ All of these acts constitute painful memories of the dark side of religious extremism. All religions are in need of forgiveness, reconciliation and healing of past memories, no matter how painful. As Francis Cardinal Arinze wrote,

No matter how difficult the effort at the healing of historical memories may be, religions owe it to humanity to engage in this together in order to build a just and lasting peace. To accept the past is a condition for realistically facing the future. Sincerity and truth are needed. Past wrongs should be acknowledged and regretted. Pardon should be sought and given. Only then will true reconciliation be firmly established.⁹¹

Inter-religious dialogue is a most effective means in aiding the healing process of religions' painful memories of the past. Dialogue provides a climate for open sharing and reconciliation; it offers an opportunity for mutual collaboration in working together for peace and harmony in society.

3. Conversion of Human Heart

All religions are against forceful conversion, but they believe in the conversion of the heart. Christianity and Islam are the two most prominent missionary religions, engaging in a concerted move towards conversion. The concept of conversion and its misinterpretation have often been the cause of mistrust, misunderstanding, conflict and violence. It is an undeniable historical fact that time and again different religions have used

89. *Religious Pluralism and Fundamentalism in Asia*, p. 91

90. *Ibid.*, p. 98

91. *Religions for Peace*, p. 84.

Francis Cardinal Arinze has been the President of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious dialogue for more than a decade and a half.

irreligious means to convert people; often applying political and economic constraints in the process.

For these reasons, suspicion and doubt are common responses to calls for inter-religious dialogue. However, these should not stand as excuses to escape dialogue. Rather, dialogue itself can remove suspicion and doubt while it helps the formation of a more tolerant relationship. The fundamental aim of religions is the conversion of the human heart toward God, not necessarily to religion, because salvation comes not from religions but from God. If conversion is aimed at religion change, religious dialogue will be impossible and violence will always remain a concern. The idea of conversion toward religion comes from an exclusive claim, resting upon a foundation of the superiority and inferiority of religion; this leads to hatred, conflict and violence.

Violence begins in the human heart with pride, hatred, desire and revenge before it turns into conflict and war. Without the conversion of the heart, a God-centered life and a peaceful, harmonious society are impossible. The aim of dialogue, therefore, should not be confused with the change of religion. Rather, the aim of truthful and non-violent dialogue should always be directed toward the conversion of heart and conversion to God. This reduces hatred, desire, and pride and creates respect, understanding and harmony. In dialogue, people learn to recognize and promote the freedom of religion.

4. Facing Common Problems Together

Living in a pluralistic world, we are faced with many common problems and challenges which demand a common response. Poverty, social injustice, drug abuse, war, terrorism, internal and external refugees, unemployment and underemployment, AIDS, and a myriad of petty and not so petty discriminations are but a few of our common problems which pose challenges to us. These challenges are not the challenges of any one particular religion or one nation, but belong to the world. No single religion or nation can face these challenges alone. Therefore it is imperative for people of all religions to strive together in responding to these challenges. Different religious groups, in mutual collaboration, can develop joint projects for social service, promoting and respecting human life,

fighting social injustice and terrorism with non-violent means and promoting peace and harmony. In this regard the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) is one of the most influential interfaith bodies working for peace on all continents. Its fifth assembly took place in Melbourne, Australia in 1989. Its overall theme was "Building Peace through Trust- the Role of Religion." This assembly declared four ways in which it could help to bring peace through trust. It declared,

- a. We build trust through disarmament and through the strengthening of institutions for conflict resolution. This kind of trust implies risk and vulnerability because it depends on acceptance of mutual dependence rather than a reliance on mutual terror...
- b. We build trust through the protection and preservation of human rights for all people.
- c. We build trust by the creation of economic systems that provide for and assure the well-being of all and that conserve and respect the ecological balance of nature.
- d. We build trust by educating ourselves and our children for peace, and through the use of non-violent methods of change and conflict resolution... Non-violence is love and love is the most powerful force against injustice and violence.⁹²

The above declaration echoes the means and methods of Gandhi's dream for a non-violent, world order. According to Gandhi, disarmament was what the world most urgently needed to do to bring about peace. Powerful nations needed to disarm themselves and give up their imperialistic ambitions, their exploitation of so called uncivilized or semi-civilized world and needed to revise their code of life. The arms race and peace could not coexist. Gandhi believed that the sword was responsible for more misery in the world than opium.⁹³ It was impossible to bring peace without Truth and non-violence. Gandhi held to this strongly as he reiterated,

My experience, daily growing stronger and richer, tells me that there is no peace for individuals or for nations without practicing

92. *Pilgrimage of Hope: One Hundred Years of Global Interfaith Dialogue*, p. 156

93. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 451

Truth and Non-violence to the uttermost extent possible for man.
The policy of retaliation has never succeeded.⁹⁴

A positive step towards peace would be for all religions to engage in joint projects such as, to give but a few examples, defending the rights of children, promoting family life, values formation, denouncing poverty and unjust social structures while and promoting just structures and a more just world. Through open and sincere religious dialogue, and their engagement in join projects for integral human development, the people of different religions would make a way for peace.

5. Dialogue as Means to Resolve Conflict

There is no society without conflict. Conflict arises from misunderstanding, prejudice, selfish desires and lack of respect for others (inclusive of their views and convictions). It is beyond doubt that dialogue, as a non-violent means, is the most practical, as well as the most effective means to remove misunderstanding, prejudice and to resolve conflict. This is why we see a growing awareness among political, social, and religious leaders to initiate dialogue in solving problems. However, we need to remember, that like Gandhi's non-violence, dialogue cannot be undertaken only as a means of problem solving, conflict resolution or as a means of bringing peace after a violent war. It cannot be taken solely as a policy to solve problems, because policy can change. It should, rather, be undertaken as an art of living and creed of life. As Wesley Ariarajah said, "Dialogue is not an ambulance service- it is a public health programme."⁹⁵ In other words, religious people have to nurture and strengthen mutual understanding and dialogue in times of peace; otherwise it might be impossible to expect to initiate dialogue in times of conflict and escalating violence.

The role of dialogue is more preventive than curative. It is not a method geared to solving an immediate problems or conflicts. Rather, it is a method of building the community of brotherhood which demands going beyond one's ethnic, racial and religious barriers. It is a method of creating a culture of peace, respecting the other in their otherness.

94. *Ibid.*, p. 457

95. *Dialogue: Resource Manual for Catholics in Asia*, p.162

6. Educating in Basic Human, Religious and Spiritual Values

Every religion is rich with many social, moral and spiritual values, which are great sources of support in the establishment of peace in the world. Religions should make a greater effort to educate their followers in basic moral, social and spiritual values. All human beings aspire to values such as peace, harmony, justice, unity, tolerance, dialogue, love and compassion. These values are all found in the human heart. Formation and education in relation to these universal values are both the consequence of and a way into inter-religious dialogue. Among the places where such educational efforts can be focused are families, schools, universities, and other religious institutes. Without religion real and sincere moral and spiritual formation is impossible. As Leo Tolstoy said,

The attempts to found a morality apart from religion are like attempts of children who, wishing to transplant a flower that pleases them, pluck it from the roots that seem to them unpleasing and superfluous, and stick it rootless into the ground. Without religion there can be no real, sincere morality, just as without roots there can be no real flower.⁹⁶

Moral formation given to children and young people in the family, school and university will create a powerful motive for human action for peaceful society. In the same way that people (soldiers) need training in the use of violent means, people need to be educated and trained to be non-violent. They need to be educated in peace, justice and a spirit of dialogue within our pluralistic society.

An Assembly of Christian Churches held in Basle, Germany, in 1989 proposed some values required to establish peace and harmony in society in the postmodern period. The meeting made clear that traditional values such as freedom, equality, brotherhood and tolerance were one-sided and insufficient to establish peace in the postmodern era. Hans Küng, in his book "Global Responsibility", wrote of the Assembly's requirements in a new age:⁹⁷

96. Leo Tolstoy, *Selected Essays*, cited in Robert J. Nash, *Religious Pluralism in the Academy, Opening the Dialogue*, (New York, Peter Lang Publishing, 2001), p.127.

97. *Global Responsibility, In Search of a New World Ethic*, p. 67-69.

a . Not just Freedom, but also Justice

For a peaceful society freedom is important, but freedom alone is not enough. In the postmodern period, justice goes hand in hand with freedom. Society has to make sure that each and every man and woman enjoys the same right and opportunity to live in solidarity with one another. The gap between the rich and poor, the powerful and powerless, which causes hunger, unemployment, and violation of human rights, should be reduced through peaceful means. A way has to be found to bring about a new, social, world order based on freedom and justice.

b . Not just Equality, but also Plurality

In the postmodern period our society, the world, is pluralistic. In this pluralistic world it is not enough to accept that everyone is equal, but the multiplicity of culture and the diversity of faith have to be recognized and respected for a peaceful society. The evils that separate, such as racial and cultural discrimination and anti-Semitism, have to be removed from the society, so that it becomes a pluralistic, world order.

c. Not just Brotherhood, but also Sisterhood

In the postmodern period, the world order is in partnership. Women, together with men, should share equal responsibility on all levels of the society. Women are to freely contribute their gifts, values and experiences. Women have to be free of any discrimination. Their gifts of life and decision-making process in the society have to be acknowledged.

d. Not just Coexistence, but also Peace

In the postmodern society, just social coexistence is not enough. The postmodern society should be a peace-loving and peace-making society, where resolution of conflicts is supported by peaceful means. This should be a community where people contribute in solidarity for the good of others. A society where human life is seen as divine. A society that opposes militarism, the arm's race, terrorism and any other form of destructive ideology and power. This world order has become peaceful.

e. Not just Productivity, but also Solidarity with the Environment.

In the postmodern period there must be an awareness of a world order that is friendly to nature. The human community is not to be

isolated from the rest of creation, but it has to recognize and respects the rights of all creatures. In this world order there would should be no destruction of nature and/or domination over it. Nature should not be devastated or destroyed in the name of economic development or personal interest and gain. Rather, man's relationship with nature must be friendly and peaceful.

f. Not just Toleration, but Ecumenism

The final postmodern requirement is that people of different faiths live not only in tolerance but in the spirit of ecumenism. As communities of believers constantly renew themselves in the spirit of forgiveness and in praise God for His love and gifts, they must resolve their mistrust, the matters of the past that caused division, intolerance and the refusal to acknowledge freedom of religion. These new citizens should engage pro-actively in joint endeavors to concretize an ecumenical world order.

D. Role of Religious Leaders

Never before has the role of religious leaders been so important in helping to set a new vision and direction for the human community in the pluralistic world. Religious leaders are the ones who form, educate, and motivate people to understand, respect, accept people of other faiths and work with them in reshaping pluralistic society. Religious leaders through their thoughts, words and deeds educate their followers not only to live in tolerance, but to live the high moral value of solidarity as well.

Religious leaders should admit their unworthiness and seek mutual forgiveness and reconciliation. They should acknowledge the existence of truth in other religions and be convinced that non-violence is the only way to truth and peace. They should resolve internal conflicts through non-violent means or dialogue. They should commit themselves to work together not only when violence breaks out, but also in relative calm and tranquil times.

Their symbolic actions make a deep impression on the minds of people and can move the world order towards peace and harmony. One such action was the Statement of Intent made between the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue (Vatican City) and the Presidency of Religious Affairs, Prime Minister's Office, Republic of Turkey in April 25, 2002. This Statement of Intent was issued in order:

1. To promote a correct understanding of religions and eliminate misunderstandings and prejudices in religious matters;
2. To uphold the freedom of religion, belief and conscience;
3. To encourage and develop training programmes providing sound information on other religions;
4. To foster inter-religious dialogue in all its forms, in particular by facilitating contacts among academic institutions concerned with the teaching of religion;
5. To monitor the implementation of this Statement of Intent through periodic meetings of representatives of both parties.⁹⁸

Religious leaders need to involve themselves in dialogue with political and social leaders in order to promote better understanding and solidarity in the pursuit of the common good. They have to make sincere efforts to insure that religious and political power not be used or misused for personal gain and that religion not be politicized, nor politics be religionized. Religious leaders have to play a reconciliatory role, pointing to justice and truth in times of communal tension, conflict and violence.

Religious leaders need to utilize the potential of mass media to increase public awareness about people of different religions. Mass media can be a powerful means to promote inter-religious dialogue; religious leaders need to develop a positive relationship with the media to better enlighten media's perception of religion and its role in transforming the world.

Religion is and has always been a fundamental element in human affairs; man cannot live without religion. However, religious conflict and violence are not problems of the past or the future, but are very much in the present. The here and now. Religious pluralism is a fact. Everywhere. It is now time for every religion to accept and respect the reality of religious pluralism in order to create a culture of peace. A religion that is not positively working for peace is negatively contributing to conflict and violence.

98. *Pro Dialogue, Pontificium Consilium Pro Dialogo Inter Religions, Bulletin 110, (2002/2) p. 193.*

This Statement of Intent is done in Rome April 25, 2002.

Gandhi in his life faced the challenge of religious pluralism in his own country and also in South Africa. His personal understanding of the problem of religious pluralism led him to the belief that all religious traditions are imperfect and they can be complementary and enrich each other, rather than being mutually exclusive rivals. This openness of Gandhi toward other religions offers a particular challenge to inter-religious dialogue. He truly believed that there is no way to peace, peace is the way, as he said, "Mankind has to get out of violence only through non-violence."⁹⁹ His inter-religious dialogue, based on truth and non-violence, was directed towards a nonviolent, peaceful and harmonious society as its end.

Martin Luther King, Jr., who led the civil rights campaign for African Americans, was deeply influenced by Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence. He strongly believed violence was immoral and an obstacle to dialogue and could not bring permanent peace. A permanent peace is possible only through non-violent dialogue. He wrote,

Violence as a way of achieving racial justice is both impractical and immoral. I am not unmindful of the fact that violence often brings about momentary results. Nations have frequently won their independence in battle. But in spite of temporary victories, violence never brings permanent peace. It solves no social problem. It merely creates new and more complicated ones. Violence is immoral because it is a descending spiral ending in destruction for all. It is immoral because it seems to humiliate the opponent rather than with his understanding; it seeks to annihilate rather than convert. It destroys community and makes brotherhood impossible. It leaves society in monologue rather than dialogue. Violence ends up defeating itself. It creates bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers.¹⁰⁰

Gandhi was optimistic about peace in the world of tomorrow, because he believed in the Godliness of human nature. According to him not to believe in the possibility of permanent peace was to

99. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 449

100. Martin Luther King, *Cited in Life In Dialogue, Pathways to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, p. 17-18. This is part of Martin Luther King's Nobel Peace Prize lecture delivered in Oslo, Norway, December 11, 1964.

disbelieve in the Godliness of human nature.¹⁰¹ Human nature has a capacity to establish permanent peace in the world. Men have to give up violence and the policy of retaliation; they need to practice love and work in solidarity with each other for the common good. In so doing, peace will follow. Gandhi, through his words and deeds, provided lived, peaceful means in transforming pluralistic society into a peaceful and harmonious world order. Martin Luther King, Jr. says the world ignores this contribution of Gandhi at its own risk, "If humanity is to progress, Gandhi is inescapable. He lived, thought and acted, inspired by the vision of a humanity evolving towards a world of peace and harmony. We may ignore him at our own risk."¹⁰²

99. *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 455.

102. Prof. N. Radhakrishnan, *The Legacy of Gandhi and the Challenges of the Twenty First Century*, cited in *Yojana*, (Oct. 1998).

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

A. Summary

The primary aim of this research is to show how Gandhi's philosophy of *Satyagraha* and *Ahimsa* become ground for inter-religious dialogue in order to promote peace and harmony in a religiously pluralistic world. It analyses the concepts of Truth, non-violence, dialogue, peace and harmony manifest in different religious traditions and in the writings of Mahatma Gandhi. This study primarily focuses on the religious traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam because these are the four religions with which Gandhi had the most contact. Religious conflicts and violence, which threaten world peace and stability, are of great concern to the world today. Inter-religious dialogue, without which world peace is impossible, is a deeply felt need in today's world. The following is a summary of the findings of this study:

1. The Sanskrit words "*Satya*" and "*Ahimsa*" are translated in English as "truth" and "non-violence". The word "*Satyagraha*", meaning "holding on to truth", is complementary to truth as it is the ultimate goal of all lovers of truth or *Satyagrahi*. The four major religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam perceive truth as the Ultimate Reality. For theistic religions this Ultimate Reality is God. For Buddhism, as non-theistic religion, this Ultimate is called *Nirvana*. Different religions bear witness to the experience of the Ultimate Reality to which they give various names: *Brahman*, the Absolute, God, *Allah*, the Great Spirit, the Transcendent. But this Ultimate surpasses any name or concept given to it. The Ultimate Reality is the source of all beings in existence. As the Ultimate Truth is unknowable, no one can claim that he knows It fully. Men can know only the conventional or relative truth. Different religions are merely conduits--ways of leading men to the Ultimate Truth. Gandhi named this Ultimate reality as Truth. For him

truth was not only one of the attributes of God, but Truth was God; Truth is God. Gandhi did not claim he knew the Truth, but considered himself to be a seeker of Truth.

2. Like Truth, Non-violence is a universal virtue, which does not exclusively belong to any particular religion, but is an essential teaching of all religions. Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam teach their followers to practice non-violence and oppose all kinds of violence. But in reality, we see religions have been directly or indirectly involved in violence or are the cause of it in the past, as well as in the present. But the existence of violence is not because religions teach it, but rather violence exists because of the misinterpretation, misuse, and/or abuse of religion for ill motives. Hinduism as a *Sanatana Dharma* (an eternal religion) promotes non-violence. The founders of Buddhism, Christianity and Islam were promoters of non-violence and preached love, compassion and respect for life. Gandhi was one of the most well-known prophets of the twentieth century who advocated and accepted non-violence as the creed of his life. For Gandhi, Truth was the goal and non-violence was the only means to attain it. Non-violence is not running away from danger or a cover for cowardice; rather, it presupposes the ability to strike. It is the supreme virtue for a real fight, which needs far greater bravery than of swordsmanship. Non-violence aims at conversion of the opponents and can be practiced by all who have deep faith in God. .

3. Inter-religious dialogue is not a new concept. Awareness of it began back in 1893 through the World's Parliament of Religion, which took place in Chicago. But the urgency for it is felt now more than ever. In the religiously pluralistic world, inter-religious dialogue is understood not as mutual imitation but as a means for mutual good example, mutual witnessing of life, readiness for mutual understanding, and mutual appreciation of each others religiosity without making any comparisons. It is a means in building relationships between believers of different faiths who are committed and rooted in their own faith, but at the same time open to other believers. The primary aims of inter-religious dialogue are to know one's own religious faith, to know the religious faith of others more authentically in order to grow in respect and tolerance, and to live fully as the dialogical process brings about mutual transformation. One can engage in dialogue in the forms of

Parliamentary dialogue, institutional dialogue, theological dialogue, spiritual dialogue, and inner dialogue.

4. The teachings of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam recognize and respect the existence of truth in other religions. By its very origin and nature, Hinduism is open to other religions. As religion and philosophy, it is comprised of many beliefs, customs, ideologies and ethical norms of behaviors. According to Vedanta philosophy the Ultimate Reality is One and different religions worship Him in different names and forms. Modern Vedantic philosophers, Swami Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi and Radhakrishnan in particular, had very dynamic and catholic views toward other religions; they viewed religions as a unity in diversity as all religions lead to the same Ultimate Truth. This catholic view toward other religions, recognizing the truth in them and the nonviolent approach to them, is the foundation of Hindu religious dialogue with other religions.

5. Buddhism is also characterized as a religion of truth, non-violence, compassion and tolerance. Buddhist teaching does not establish the truth by excluding its opposites as falsehoods but including them as other forms of the same truth. Its open approach to truth and its nonviolent attitude toward other religions lead its followers to be actively involved in inter-religious activities.

6. Traditionally, Christianity has been seen as an exclusive religion, which tended to claim superiority in relation to other religions. Taking a historical perspective, however, it is evident that Christianity has changed its view of other religions over the course of its two thousand years of history. In the past the church not only had a negative but also aggressive view toward other religions. It was only in the second half of the last century that the Catholic Church, in particular, officially recognized the existence of truth in other religions and expressed a sincere desire to enter into dialogue with them. The Catholic Church established the Pontifical Council for the Relation of the Church with the non-Christian religions in order to continue a permanent program of inter-religious dialogue. The Church has accepted dialogue as an important part of its mission and expresses its true identity through dialogue. Other Christian

Churches, besides the Catholic Church, have involved themselves in similar dialogue in an organized manner and with rigor.

7. Islam is strictly a monotheistic religion. Its Holy Scripture recognizes not only the existence of other religions, but it also reaffirms the existence of truth in them. Diversity is seen as an enrichment of God's creation, which requires the practice of tolerance between persons in the doing of good. In the Holy Qu'ran, Jews, Christians and Muslims are considered as "People of the Book" which expresses special unity among these three religions. According to Fethullah Gulan, an Islamic Scholar, the four universal values: Love, compassion, tolerance and forgiveness are the pillars of dialogue. In the last few decades, many Islamic groups, such as the Islamic Conference of Jeddah, the World Muslim League and the World Muslim Congress, have been engaged in inter-religious dialogue.

8. Gandhi was truly a religious man. He had the view that no one can live without religion. For him religion meant to accept God for life and to be religious meant to be bound to God. Gandhi's view of religion was derived from the concept of *dharma*, which in essence teaches truth and non-violence. For this reason, Gandhi's religion was the religion of Truth and non-violence. Over time he also concluded that truth and non-violence are the essential teachings of all religions. For him Truth is God and all religions are searching for the same Truth. Non-violence, as a universal value, includes many other values such as love, compassion, respect for life, tolerance and justice and is the only way to search for the Truth.

9. After an extensive study of other religions, Gandhi came to the conclusion that all religions are God-given; no religion is perfect, only God is perfect. All religions have limitation as they are transmitted and interpreted by imperfect human beings. No religion can claim superiority and no religion is inferior to any other. Truth is not the exclusive property of any particular religion because it is larger than any one religion, but all religions share truth about the Ultimate Truth. For Gandhi religions are meant to bind people together as one family under the Fatherhood of God.

10. The true practice of religion leads people to self-purification and self-realization. In order to fulfill this intention Gandhi practiced religion through fasting, prayer and social service. These three

practices are also prescribed by all religions. Fasting helped Gandhi to purify his heart and mind; prayer lead him to serve humanity. It was through service to humanity Gandhi realized God and himself.

11. Gandhi looked on life as an integrated whole and he believed religious faith, conviction and values should influence all aspects of human life. He believed that there could not be religion without morality and politics without religious faith, conviction and values is absolute dirt. Gandhi's spirit of deep involvement in politics came from his religious faith and conviction; his involvement was intended to give service to humanity. Gandhi also believed that human formation and education were incomplete without religious education, for the primary aim of education is character building for which religious education is necessary.

12. Gandhi was emphatically against proselytization, because all religions are like branches of the same tree, which is the tree of Truth. These branches may vary in size and shape but all are connected to the same Truth. Religions are not ends in themselves, but means to the same end. For this reason conversion as a change of religion is not necessary. Rather, Gandhi emphasized that the primary aim of religions should be conversion of heart and conversion to God. Salvation ultimately comes from God, not from religions. Religions only show the way to God and the way to salvation. Gandhi always recognized human freedom in the practice of religion.

13. Gandhi had an objective view of other religions. Because of his extensive study of religions, he was able to discover what was best in each religion. However, he did not hesitate to point to what was inconsistent with his faith and conviction. In his Hindu religion Gandhi found universal tolerance, love for truth and non-violence, respect for all life, and the spirit of renunciation. For Gandhi the inconsistencies in Hinduism were in the caste system, untouchability and animal sacrifice, as was prescribed in the Vedas. Gandhi found animal sacrifice against his concept of non-violence.

Gandhi perceived Buddhism as a branch of Hinduism and Buddha as a great Hindu reformer. Buddha interpreted the Hindu religion as a religion of truth, non-violence and renunciation that he found in *Dharma*. One of the most important contributions Buddha made to the world, according to Gandhi, was his restoration of God to His eternal place. Gandhi interpreted *Nirvana* as living peace, living happiness and

total liberation, which comes out of the self-conscious and proper understanding of the nature of one's soul. Rather than being a pessimistic expression, Gandhi understood it is a positive expression.

Gandhi was also deeply impressed and influenced by the teaching and personality of Jesus. He considered Jesus as one of the greatest teachers of humanity. His concept of *Satyagraha* was deeply influenced by the noble sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and the non-violent teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. What Gandhi found inconsistent in Christianity was its exclusive claim of superiority over all other religions and its missionary activities related to conversion. He was not, however, against conversion, if it was based on free will.

Gandhi perceived in Islam a clear teaching on monotheism, rigorous ethical discipline, and a concept of brotherhood. According to Gandhi, however, the Islamic concept of *Jihad* is open to misinterpretation and misuse. He believed that the conditions laid down for it were so strict that not everyone could fulfill them. He also believed that human imperfection and ill will toward others helped to create conflict and violence in the name of God.

14. This study clearly indicates that in the present, religiously pluralistic world no religion can deny the importance and urgency of inter-religious dialogue for peaceful and harmonious social living. In the midst of fanaticism, terrorism, conflict and division, there is a great desire among the major religions for dialogue in order to promote and sustain peace and harmony in society. Gandhi's philosophy of *Satyagraha* and *Ahimsa* prepare the ground for such inter-religious dialogue in order to bring peace and harmony to the world.

15. Religious formation and education in the family deeply influenced Gandhi to be a man of dialogue in his later life. Gandhi, as practical idealist, always dreamt of creating universal brotherhood on the basis of truth and non-violence. This universal brotherhood was to be primarily moral and social. He sincerely worked until his last breath to give a living reality to his dream. Gandhi considered that working for universal brotherhood to be his divine mission in life.

16. Much of Gandhi's life-energy was spent in the promotion of Hindu-Muslim unity. While working for India's freedom from Britain's colonial power and the reformation of the socio-economic,

political and religious aspects of Indian life, Gandhi experienced the evil effects of religious conflicts, communal riots and violence arising between Hindus and Muslims. This was the context in which all of his inter-religious dialogical efforts were tested. He knew he was involved in a most challenging work, that might very well cost him his life, but he believed that without dialogue peace and harmony among religions were impossible.

17. Gandhi's involvement in inter-religious dialogue on the basis of *Satyagraha* and *Ahimsa* can be seen on two levels: the theoretical and the practical level. Gandhi's approach to theoretical dialogue was a sympathetic understanding of all the living religions of the world. He believed that education without the study of religion was incomplete because religion is a vital aspect of human culture and civilization. People who neglected the study of religion run the risk of failing to understand humanity and history. Gandhi however, gave more emphasis on practical dialogue rather than theoretical dialogue. His practical dialogue was a dialogue of life in his ashram community and with the poor, with the untouchables in particular. His fasting, prayer, and social service were part of his practical dialogue, as was his sensitivity and respect for other religions, which enabled mutual cooperation for the common objectives of truth and justice.

18. With *Satyagraha* as the basis for inter-religious dialogue, all religions hold onto the same truth or are searching for the same truth. For this reason, truth becomes a unifying principle. As this truth is the ultimate Truth, it is essential for human existence. Through religions' search for truth, humanity comes closer to the fullness of the Truth. Truth as an essential and unifying principle brings all religions together for dialogue. This Ultimate Truth is also revealed by the scriptures and prophets of different religions, for they were holding onto the Ultimate Truth. Respect for all scriptures and all the holy prophets enables all religions to engage in dialogue, for these scriptures and holy prophets all point the way to the Truth and help to reveal Truth.

19. *Ahimsa*, like truth, is a universal value, which is an essential teaching of all religions. If this value is practiced by persons of one religion toward other religious people, it brings them together for dialogue. The practice of *Ahimsa* positively means the practicing of some other universal values, which are also common to all religions. These values are tolerance, respect for religion, compassion and love, justice and religious freedom, respect for life,

and communion and brotherhood. The practice of these common values brings the people of different faiths together for dialogue. *Ahimsa* is a divine attribute and its practice leads people to a higher spiritual perfection. The essential aim of religion is to perfect men spiritually as well as morally. True spiritual perfection comes through sincere practice of religion. This practice opens men's minds and inspires them to enter into dialogue with people of other faith traditions. It is the external aspect of religion that separates people, but it is the spiritual aspect of religion that unites all human beings. Non-violent religious practice such as fasting, prayer and social service lead people to dialogue; these were also Gandhi's means for dialogue.

20. In a negative sense, religious traditions describe peace and harmony as states of freedom from war, violence, unrest, quarrelling and/or worry. But peace and harmony are more than just freedom from war and violence. In its positive form, peace can be described as peace of mind, serenity, friendliness, harmony and tranquility, communion and the brotherhood of men. In a pluralistic society, peace is the fruit of justice; it is living a meaningful life with right relationships with God and humankind, among human beings, and between human beings and other creatures. It is also viewed as wholeness, completeness, and being full and perfect.

21. One of the essential aims of religions is the bringing of peace and harmony to the world. All religions have peace as part of their message; their founders were prophets of peace. However, despite their message of peace, religions are directly or indirectly the cause of conflict and violence. But the existence of this conflict and violence is not because religions teach them, but rather because of people's ignorance of their own religion and/or the religion of others. Often religions are used and/or misused for political or ill purposes, which spark hatred and violence. Religions, in themselves, are powerful means for promoting peace and harmony in society.

22. In order to promote peace and harmony we need to employ peaceful means. Inter-religious dialogue is a peaceful means in bringing about peace among religions and in the world. Through dialogue we learn to respect and accept the facts of religious pluralism. Dialogue helps in the healing of the memories of hatred and violence. It enables the conversion of people's hearts and minds. Inter-religious dialogue also aids in people's facing common problems and challenges. Dialogue enables bonding between

peoples that strengthens solidarity in mutual collaboration in the work for society's common good. In the time of conflict and violence, dialogue becomes an effective means in solving the conflict and in the promotion of peace.

23. Education and formation play big roles in relation to inter-religious dialogue. People have to be educated and formed in truth, non-violence, peace and dialogue. The role of dialogue itself is more preventive than curative. For this reason, continuous education and formation in dialogue contribute to the reduction of conflict and violence. People, who are educated and formed, are better able to confront violence and conflict together. The role of religious leaders is vital to this educational process. In committing themselves to walk the path of dialogue, they motivate the people to respect other religious faiths and live in tolerance. As well, they are models for their followers on how to be respectful and tolerant. Engaging in dialogue with other political and social leaders, religious leaders help to curb the misuse and abuse of religion and encourage and inspire mutual promotion of peace and harmony.

24. Since Gandhi believed in the Godliness of human nature, he was optimistic about a peaceful and harmonious world of tomorrow. He believed there is a capacity in human nature to establish permanent peace in the world. For this to happen, men have to give up violence and the policy of retaliation. As well, men need to practice love, enter into sincere dialogue, and work in solidarity with one another for the common good. If this is done, peace will follow. Gandhi, through his words and deeds, provided means to the world for the fruition of peace, which the world can no longer ignore.

B. Conclusion :

This study clearly indicates that Gandhi's core philosophy of *Satyagraha* and *Ahimsa* is also the essential teaching of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. As expounded in Chapter II, we saw how all religions perceive the meaning of *Satyagraha* and *Ahimsa*. How all religions are in search of the Ultimate Truth, though they name and claim this Truth with differing names and descriptions. While searching for the Ultimate Truth, all religions teach *Ahimsa* as the means to reach this Truth. While religions differ in their externals, rituals, dogmas and doctrines, they hold the

Ultimate Truth and the means of its search in common. These commonly held realities make up the essence of religion.

We further saw that through the centuries, different groups, communities and nations involved in war and conflict on the basis of ethnic, religious and cultural differences have considered each other as threats. In the third millennium, our pluralistic world faces violence and terrorism as its greatest challenges. These challenges are deeply rooted in religio-cultural antagonism, ignorance, fundamentalism and religious exclusivity. These challenges of conflict and violence seem to validate the thesis that inter-religious dialogue is becoming a necessity, not just for peace and harmony, but rather, for the very survival of humanity. Therefore, as one engages in the necessity of inter-religious dialogue, it is important that one enter the process with an understanding of how the different religious traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam perceive the importance of inter-religious dialogue; Chapter III of the Study assists in this understanding. It is also here that Gandhi's core philosophy of *Satyagraha* and *Ahimsa* contribute an openness and tolerance to engage non-violently (lovingly, compassionately, respectfully) with others in inter-religious dialogue in our mutual search of the Truth.

Truth and non-violence, as universal and absolute values, urge people to engage in dialogue. A first step in moving towards peace in the world is for people to engage in inter-religions dialogue, developing and honing their dialectic skills. Secondly, people have to develop moral and spiritual values. Gandhi's Truth and non-violence fulfill both. Truth and non-violence as core concepts of Gandhi's philosophy become the metaphysical, ethical and spiritual foundation for the promotion of dialogue among differing religions. Consequently, for Gandhi, inter-religious dialogue becomes the very praxis for the realization of a person's search for the Ultimate Truth.

Inter-religious dialogue, built on a foundation of the commonality of mutual respect and the search for the Ultimate Truth, promotes peace, as well as models a lived experience of conscientization, understanding, acceptance and the lessening of prejudice. Consequently, inter-religious dialogue becomes the context wherein we become increasingly aware of our oneness with Ultimate Truth and our oneness in the brotherhood of humanity.

Peace and harmony, for which all people long, are the fruits of justice, love, compassion, forgiveness, communion and unity in our diverse society. Since all religions uphold peace and harmony, all religious people should accept the fact that unity is not possible without diversity. Recognition of this diversity opens the door for dialogue. Negation of diversity is the negation of dialogue, which results in intolerance. Negation of diversity and dialogue cause social injustice, a political double standard, religious persecution and violence. Tolerance and respect for diversity come from four important principles: respect for human life, the basic equality of all human beings, universal human rights and the fundamental freedom of thought, faith and conviction. These four principles are in essence derived from Gandhi's philosophy of truth and non-violence. The true practice of truth and non-violence lead all in the path of dialogue, with peace and harmony the end results.

From an objective view of religion, an objective view which Gandhi himself held, it is a fact that extremism, terrorism and other forms of violence in the name of religion have nothing to do with the authentic understanding of religion. They are in fact threats to humanity. True knowledge of religion breaks down barriers between faiths and cultivates tolerance of other faiths. When conflicts are not reduced or settled through dialogue, violence arises. Violence as a means to resolve conflict brings about a sense of deprivation and injustice, which leads to terrorism. The root cause of violence in the form of terrorism is hatred against an individual or a particular group of people, society or country. When people lose their wisdom and rationality, they involve themselves in violence, at times even in the name of religion. Non-violence is the only way to counter violence, for violence cannot be put to an end by counter-violence. Resolution of conflict with a nonviolent means such as dialogue is an essential condition for bringing peace to a society. Violence may have some immediate success and victory, but it is very temporary. Non-violence is a more powerful means than violence. It works slowly but eventually wins the hearts and minds of the opposition. It is a powerful means that can be used by everyone, rich and poor, strong and weak, youth and adults. This is the truth. It is the way that all founders of religious traditions taught their followers. This is the truth that Gandhi searched for and found, believed and practiced. It

is Gandhi's (holding on to truth) *Stayagraha* in (non-violence) *Ahimsa* that grounds inter-religious dialogue, moving persons closer to the actualization of peace and harmony.

In following the path of non-violence and dialogue in the promotion of peace and harmony within society, education plays an important role. Just as people are trained in violence, so too must persons be educated and formed to live nonviolently. Students, be they of the grassroots or of religious leadership, or of differing educational levels, should be introduced and trained in the culture of peace. The tremendous moral and spiritual values common to the religions of the world should be part of students' culture of peace formation. Through the educational process, qualities of life such as: non-violence, self-control, peace, tolerance, respect, dialogue, and humility should be cultivated to enable students to develop a healthy attitude towards life and the culture of peace. New curricula needs to be developed and existing curricula examined to ensure formation in respect and tolerance of other religions, thereby eliminating mistaken beliefs that promote violence and hatred over religious differences. Thus, students will be better able to enter into dialogue with persons of other faiths and through dialogue continue to grow in the spirit of respect and tolerance. Gandhi's philosophy of *Satyagraha* and *Ahimsa* is the very ground for this formation.

Even though happiness, peace and harmony are the aims of all human beings, perfect happiness, peace and harmony can never be found in this imperfect world. Though the founders of all religions realized and practiced the principles of truth and non-violence in their lives, many of their followers have failed to do so and will fail to do so in the future. In the pleasant face of the diversity of creeds, cultures and nations, unity and peace will always remain challenges. But in meeting these challenges an inclusive, pluralist approach, such as inter-religious dialogue is both powerful and effective. Through inter-religious dialogue, each religion can recognize its strengths and limitations while it strives to overcome them. Through dialogue they can better see the truth in their own religion, as well as the truth in other religions. Dialogue can reduce ignorance, misunderstanding and misinterpretation of other religions. Dialogue, while enabling those engaged to grow in respect and tolerance toward others, will also help those engaged to resolve and even prevent conflict. Mahatma Gandhi, through words and

deeds, lived his religion and practiced his philosophy of *Satyagraha* (holding on to truth) and *Ahimsa* (non-violence) and entered into sincere dialogue with other religions in order to create a new world order where every religion could contribute to the culture of peace without losing their own identity. His philosophy of *Satyagraha* and *Ahimsa* becomes the ground for inter-religious dialogue in the promotion of peace and harmony for our world. If we ignore Gandhi's path of *Satyagraha* and *Ahimsa*, as Martin Luther King, Jr. commented, we do so at our own risk.

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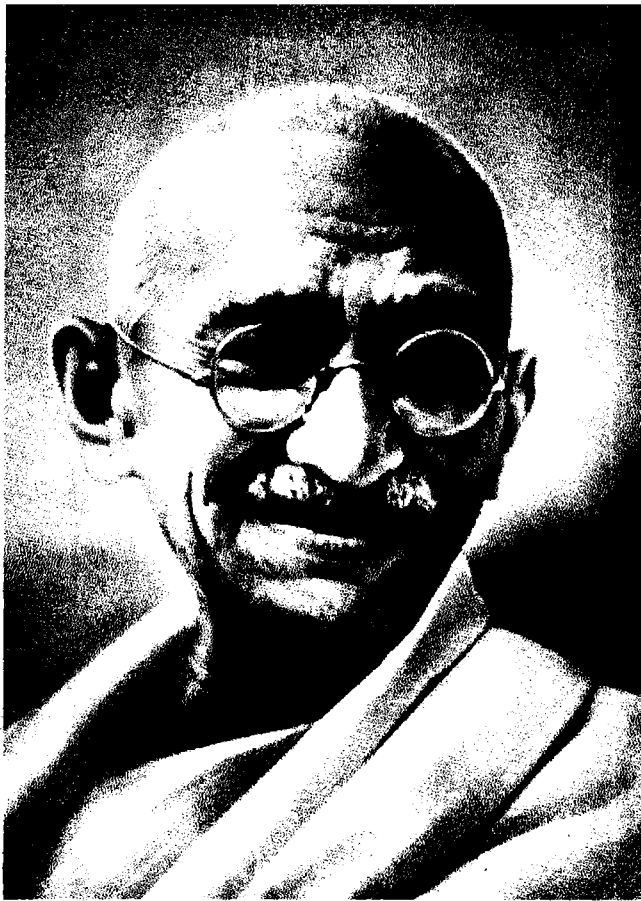
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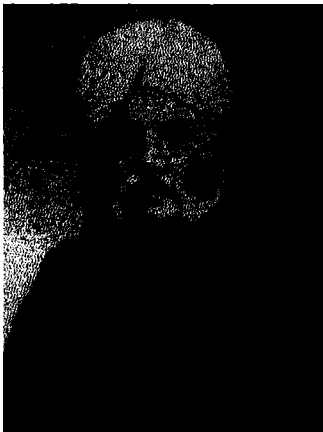
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Mahatma Gandhi & his Father Mother





Young Gandhi





Mahatma Gandhi wife Kasturba Gandhi







Gandhi with Nehru

Gandhi with Subhash Bose





Gandhi with Tagore

Gandhi with Jinnah





Gandhi





MAHATMA GANDHI

TRUTH AND NON-VIOLENCE

Dr. Fr. Hemanto Pius Rozario, CSC

When I read Fr. Hemanto's dissertation on Mahatma Gandhi and religious pluralism I thought, "Here is something timely and practical." Gandhi's core principles were not even religious. They were universal. Satyagraha (grasping or seizing truth) and Ahimsa (non-violence) were principles for everyone to practice. They are also the main terms for inter-religious dialogue. Gandhi concluded after long years of reflection that all religions are true and God-given. They all look at life in different ways but they are similar in many respects. Some interpretations of truth and non-violence (e.g., of jihad) are controversial but the universality of human rights can do much for softening the harshness of strict applications. "Fifty million Frenchmen can't be wrong," and 6.5 billion people interpreting human rights reasonably have even greater reason to have truth on their side. By emphasizing the points we agree upon we draw together in tolerance, good will and common action.

Fr. R W Timm, CSC