# CHRISTIAN MISSIONS IN THE PLURALISTIC CONTEXT OF INDIA – THE RELEVANCE OF GANDHIAN APPROACH

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#### October 2002

FOR THOSE WHO SILENTLY
LIVE THE MESSAGE OF THE
GOSPEL

# School of Gandhian Thought and Development Studies MAHATMA GANDHI UNIVERSITY



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This is to certify that my thesis entitled "CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

IN THE PLURALISTIC CONTEXT OF INDIA-THE RELEVANCE

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PHILOSOPHY (Ph.D.) is a bonafide record of research work done by me

at the School of Gandhian Thought and Development Studies, Mahatma

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not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree other than

Master's Degree or Diploma, Associateship, Fellowship or other similar

title and that it has been composed by me independently.

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#### **ABBREVIATIONS**

AG - Assembly of God

BJP - Bharatiya Janatha Party

CBCI - Catholic Bishops' Conference of India

CHAI - Church History Association of India

CISRS - Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and

Society

CLS - Christian Literature Society

CMS - Church Missionary Society

CNI - Church of North India

CSS - Christava Sahithya Samithi

CWMG - The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi

EHC - Every Home Crusade

EPW - Economic and Political Weekly

FFT - Fellowship of Friends and Truth

FMPB - Friends Missionary Prayer Band

GFA - Gospel for Asia

ICHR - Indian Church History Review

IEHC - India Every Home Crusade

IEM - Indian Evangelical Mission

IET - Indian Evangelical Team

IMA - Indian Mission Association

IPC - Indian Pentecostal Church

IRM - International Review of Mission

ISPCK - Indian Society for Promoting Christian

Knowledge

LMS - London Missionary Society

NCCI - National Council of Churches in India

NMS - National Missionary Society

OM - Operation Mobilisation

RSS - Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh

SCM - Student Christian Movement

VHP - Vishwa Hindu Parishad

VHW - Village Health Worker

WCC - World Council Churches

YMCA - Young Men Christian Association

YWCA - Young Women Christian Association

ZMM - Zenana Medical Mission

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#### CHAPTER 1

# **INTRODUCTION**

1.1	Statement of the problem
1.2	Purpose of the study
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1.5	Methodology
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#### CHAPTER ONE

#### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Statement of the problem

India has been acclaimed as a land of religions and spirituality. All major religions of the world co-existed in this land for centuries in an atmosphere of mutual respect and tolerance. The reputation that India gained in this respect has won for it a place of pride and prestige in the comity of nations of the world.

However, the equilibrium of this great tradition of tolerance and mutual respect had not been undisturbed in its long history. Whenever one religion claimed superiority over the other religions or denounced other religions the balance was upset, often leading to inter religious clashes and the creation of communalism. The consequences were serious and far-reaching. But viewed historically communal flare-ups and inter religious clashes were mostly transient phenomena. In all such conflict situations people of true religiosity intervened and impressed upon all the need to understand each other and saw to it that the true spirit of religion (as a unifying and integrating force) prevailed ultimately. The lost equilibrium was restored and the flow of life was straightened and smoothened.

Contemporary India is witnessing inter religious rivalry and conflict at a level unheard of in its past history. Both in terms of its

extent and intensity it has assumed alarming proportions<sup>1</sup>. In the confrontation the protagonists of Hindutva pit themselves against Christianity and / or Islam as the case may be. The opposition has even led to demolition of places of worship, vandalizing and looting institutions, disrupting prayer meetings, attacking priests and nuns and killing missionaries and innocent people. This has invited counter violence in certain areas.

Some prominent Hindu leaders and organisations allege that Christians are engaged in coercive conversion activities as part of an international conspiracy to Christianise India and, therefore, they ask for a legal ban on conversion. Christians on the other hand say that they are victims of the communal politics of Hindu nationalist forces now in power. But the fact is that Christian missionary activities from its very inception in India have created a strong negative response from Hindu Organisations. It was mainly due to the aggressive evangelism and conversion programmes of Christian missionaries.

It is, indeed, a fact that in contemporary India Christian missions especially evangelical groups are engaged in evangelism and conversion on a mass scale. They do this because they believe that Christianity is the only salvific faith and it is the duty of a true believer

The demolition of Babri Masjid and destruction of several Christian churches in the states of Gujarat, Orissa etc. are citable instances. The burning of Australian missionary Staines and his two sons is another instance of communal frenzy. Refer: - S.Kalidas, "Christians under siege", <u>INDIA TODAY</u> June 26, 2000:30-31 and Praveen Swami, "A catalogue of crimes", <u>FRONTLINE</u> February 12, 1999:13-15 for list of attacks on Christians.

to spread this message and help convert people to this faith who will otherwise be condemned to eternal damnation. This exclusivist attitude not only belittles the significance of other religions but also repudiates the very raison d'etre of other religions. The evangelical mission groups are supported financially and otherwise by patrons stationed in Europe and America. These evangelical groups and missions conduct religious as well as social activities like village evangelism, medical camps, adult literary programmes, vocational schools etc. for the benefit of their target groups<sup>2</sup>. The facilities provided by the Christian mission groups are a natural attraction and allurement for the poor. So when they are asked to abandon their old religious traditions and practices they do it with ease and impunity. Hindu organisations allege that through such activities, Christian missions not only wean the poor and the ignorant from their ancestral religions but also uproot and alienate them from their culture. This results in social tension between converts and others. Christian mission activities have led negatively to the consolidation and activisation of Hindu communal forces and given them a new and strong stick to strike back. It has also generated, positively, a discussion on the role that religion should play in people's lives and also on the nature and basis of inter religious relations. The study is conducted against this background and seeks to explore these issues and questions in detail.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> See the report of the case study in chapter Two

Gandhi had faced this problem of Hindu-Christian distrust, enmity and confrontation during his days and had suggested certain solutions to this problem. He had serious reservations about the (over) emphasis the missionaries laid on the aspect of preaching / spreading the gospel using unfair means. He said if missionaries could refrain from 'telling' India about Christ and had lived a life enjoined upon them by the Sermon on the Mount, India instead of suspecting them would have better appreciated and welcomed their presence. He wanted Christians to live the message of Christ rather than annotate it. He did not believe in telling others of one's faith with a view to convert them into one's own.

This study, in the light of the above stated facts and the suggestions offered by Gandhi, proposes to examine the nature and extent of Christian mission activities in the contemporary situation of India. It tries to find whether mission activities are the cause of inter religious confrontation and pave the way for the rise of Hindu communalism and counter communalism. For this purpose the researcher visited the hot spots of inter religious clashes in the states of Madhya Pradesh and Orissa and conducted field study. Analysis of the data collected from these field study visits is included in the study.

#### 1.2 Purpose of the study

The pluralistic identity of India is now in jeopardy. Hindu zealots allege that Christian missionary activities leading to conversion are the prime reason behind this. They argue for the immediate expulsion of all foreign missionaries from India and a legal ban on religious conversion. The Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has called for a national debate on religious conversion. Defense Minister George Fernandes has hinted about an international conspiracy hatched by Christian fundamentalist groups to destabilise the present Government of India (which is led by the pro Hindutva BJP). The RSS functionaries went a step further and alleged that Christian propaganda is intended to decimate Hinduism. In the light of the above criticisms the present study aims at a general survey and analysis of the activities of Christian missions in India with a view to find out (1) how far these criticisms are based on facts (2) what role the activities of the Christian missions play in generating and aggravating Hindu-Christian communal tensions in India.

It was not only the Hindutva proponents who confronted the Christian missions both at the levels of theory and practice. Gandhi too had a long and meaningful contact with Christian missions. While the so-called Hindutva ideologues lacked openness and spirit of tolerance, Gandhi was consistently open and assimilative. He examined Christianity and learned from Christians. He openly admitted his indebtedness to Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount and the core factor of his non-violence was inspired by Jesus himself. Christians too saw in Gandhi a true manifestation of Christian spirit. Many Christians had deepened their understanding of Christianity through dialogues with him. Many world leaders have acknowledged him as a true representative of Christ. Because of his Christianness and years of experience in confronting missionaries' proselytizing activities he was probably the most eligible

person to offer necessary guidelines for Christian missions on how to conduct themselves in the communally precarious situation of India. The main purpose of the present study is to examine the Gandhian guidelines in detail in order to find out how relevant they are for Christian mission activities in today's India.

#### 1.3 Hypothesis

The study proceeded on the assumption that, the paradigm suggested by Gandhi- i.e., to live the message of the Sermon on the Mount or in other words to practice the precepts of Jesus in ones own life-is the best way to spread the gospel of Jesus. In the multi-faith situation of India the exclusivist claim of any one religion will be untenable as it would only lead to inter-religious distrust and hatred and ultimately result in violent clashes and the generation of communalism. It would obviously negate the possibility of mutual understanding and consequently disturb and destroy peaceful coexistence among religions. It is also important to note that Gandhi's arguments crystallised into his concept of *Sarvadharma Samabhava* equality of religions and equal respect for all religions were more in tune with the concept of the universal salvific will of God, which means that the will of God operates through all religions and salvation is possible through each of them.

#### 1.4 Scope of the study

Incidents of atrocities against Christian missionaries Christian institutions and Christian converts were reported from different states in

The gruesome burning of the Australian missionary Grahams India. Staines along with his two children in Orissa, have been described as one of the most tragic and black deed in the history of independent Nuns are attacked and priests and Christian workers are assaulted, threatened and murdered. Prayer assemblies and fasting sessions are disrupted and participants beaten up. Church authorities released a long list of such atrocities perpetrated against Christians in different parts of the country at different times<sup>3</sup>. The cumulative impression sought to be driven is that Christians are no longer safe in India. Christian leaders allege that Hindu revivalist groups are behind these heinous crimes and rampage and condemn such acts in strong language. On the other hand Hindu fundamentalist groups insist that, those attacked are Christian missionaries who are involved in illegal Many Hindu organisations allege that, the conversion activities. Christian missionary activity in India is tearing apart families and communities in every strata of Indian society. This has led to communal clashes in remote areas of India.

The exchange of allegations and physical violence is not a new development; it is as old as Christian missionary enterprise in India. But with the advent of new militants Hindu outfits like VHP, Bagrangdal, Hindu Jagaran Manch etc. the dimension of this encounter has changed drastically and has assumed alarming proportion. This calls

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Refer the list published by United Christian Forum for Human Rights, <u>A</u>
Register of Atrocities Against Christians Centre for Religious Freedom, CBCI,
New Delhi, 1999.

for an open examination of the question of the nature, purpose and extent of Christian missionary activities in India with special reference to religious conversion. For this a study of Gandhi's ideas on role of Christian mission in the pluralistic situation of India can prove relevant as the Gandhian model can be placed before the missions as a viable alternative. This might lead to a meaningful dialogue with various mission groups who are at present engaged in aggressive evangelization might be persuaded to remodel their work on an acceptable and non-provocative style.

#### 1.5 Methodology

The general methodology followed in this study is a judicious blend of the theoretical, analytical and descriptive methods. It also incorporates components of historical method. A case study method is also adopted in the study for illustrating some of the key issues raised in the study.

#### 1.6 Sources of the study

A variety of source materials had been consulted for this research. Primary source such on reports, and records of mission activities of various evangelical mission groups are consulted. The secondary sources such as books, articles published in various journals, newspapers, periodicals and previous study papers are made use for this study. Other useful information was collected through structured and unstructured interviews.

#### 1.7 Organisation of the study

Though many factors have contributed to the rise of Hindu communalism in contemporary India, the present study concentrates on and examines the activities of Christian missions only in order to find out to what extent they are responsible for communal problems in contemporary India.

For analysing the problem the conventional missionary approach in India has been studied. The responses to Christian missions from Hindu reformers like Rajaram Mohun Roy, Dayananda Saraswati, and Vivekananda have been surveyed in the study as they were precursors of certain tendencies prevalent in present day Hinduism. For example Dayananda was the first man to propound *Suddhi* and *Sanghathan*. This has immensely influenced many militant Hindu groups. The views of Hindu nationalists like Savarkar, Golwalkar and Tilak et. al who represent the Hindu militant stream of thought contributed significantly to the Hindu awakening in the twentieth century leading to revitalisation and self-assertion of Hindu society are also summarised.

In the backdrop of the above facts the thesis surveys Gandhi's arguments and examines whether the Gandhian model can serve as a viable model for Christian mission activities in the multi-religious context of India.

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter begins with a statement of the problem, and goes on to explain the purpose of the study, hypotheses on which it is based and the methodology followed, and sets forth its scope and limits.

Chapter two deals with the activities of Christian missions in India. It analyses the problem, defines mission, surveys and reviews traditional missionary approaches and describes mission and conversion and modern trends in conversion. It also incorporates case studies in a brief survey and assessment of the activities of some evangelical groups in the state of Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. The reasons advanced by Hindu groups for their (violent) responses are stated in this chapter.

The third chapter attempts a brief survey of the history of Christian missions in India, shedding light on the origin of Christianity in India, the arrival of Portuguese and Protestant missions in the country and their agenda to Christianise India.

The fourth chapter evaluates the negative and positive impact of Christian missions on Indian social life against the backdrop of the impact of western education and civilization on the Indian psyche.

The fifth chapter deals with different responses to Christian missions from certain stalwarts of the Hindu religious tradition, comprising of the pioneers of the socio-religious movement of nineteenth century, and militant Hindu nationalists like Savarkar and Golwalkar and also from organisations like RSS, VHP and the BJP.

The sixth chapter discusses Gandhi's encounter with Christian missions. His attitude to Christian missionaries, Indian Christians, religious conversion etc. are discussed. The reasons for his opposition to Christian proselytization are also enumerated in the chapter.

In the seventh chapter a Gandhian model for Christian mission is presented. It is followed by a survey of the Christian responses to it. The responses of C.F. Andrews, S.K. George and Stanley Jones who were Christians of the inner Gandhi circle are included which show the plurality and contradictory nature of the Christian responses. There are individuals and organisations that do Christian work in various parts of India in the true spirit of selfless love as exemplified in the life of Jesus and after the model proposed by Gandhi for Christian missions. Three examples of Christian service in the above style are cited that would validate Gandhi's arguments and serve as viable models for mission work.

The study ends with a concluding part, which offers a general guideline for the conduct of Christian missions in India, in the light of the spirit of the Gandhian model, which would help in protecting and preserving the hoary Indian tradition of religious pluralism and harmony.

#### 1.8 Limitations

A word about the limitations of the study is called for here.

- The study makes a reference to the history of Christianity in India which stretches to two thousand years and has passed through various phases and vicissitudes. These are not adequately reported lest the study become unwieldy and too long. However, care was taken to paint properly important milestones.
- 2. Christian proselytization and the militant Hindu response to it is the immediate backdrop of this study. A vast area of northern, northwestern and north-eastern regions of the Indian subcontinent is the arena of this battle of sorts. A study on the question under consideration would be complete only if these areas where the conflict is really taking place are brought under close focus. But it is well-nigh impossible to do that considering the sheer largeness of the area and the expected length of a study like this. So, the researcher had to limit his research to two relevant regions namely the states of Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. These states are chosen not only because these are areas of intense and aggressive proselytization activities but also because these activities have invited an equally intense and aggressive counter offensive. However, the fact that these two states, though they constitute a typical crucible and cross section, are only a small area, acts as a limiting factor.
  - 3. A third factor is the dilemma faced by the researcher in reconciling the incongruity between the statistics published by

the mission groups where the tally of the saved (read converted) souls is very high, and the true facts and figures at the ground level. There is a clear discrepancy to be noted here. The mission groups have not really converted as many persons as they claim. The Hindu militants who oppose conversions take the statistics as correct and factual and organise their response accordingly. The non-availability of correct and reliable statistics has acted as a constraining factor in this study. However, this discrepancy is taken serious note of while analysing the field situation.

The researcher has special care not to allow these limitations to impair the main focus of the study.

It has been generally agreed up on by Christian thinkers and theologians that true mission work understood in the light of the message of Jesus is selfless service and sacrifice for the sake of those who are served. Linking Christian service with conversion is but a blatant negation of the spirit of the gospel. Taking note of this widely shared code, the study proposes to evaluate the activities of Christian missions in the contemporary situation of India in some detail.

# CHRISTIAN MISSIONS IN THE CONTEMPORARY SITUATION OF INDIA

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- 2.10.4 IEM and their main activities
  - (i) Village evangelism
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- 2.11 Why tribals and the backward classes are attracted to Christianity?
- 2.12 Why Hindu groups oppose Christian missionary activities?

#### **CHAPTER TWO**

## CHRISTIAN MISSIONS IN THE CONTEMPORARY SITUATION OF INDIA

#### 2.1 Background

It is a fact that there is a revival of religious communalism and communal politics in India today, which often gets erupted into communal violence. It has been complained that the minority communities especially the Christians and Muslims in Indian society feel insecure. At times it seems that the tensions between the majority and minorities are going to destroy the very foundation of the existence of India as a nation and a nation state. Indian politicians and political parties too indulge in communal politics. All those who are concerned about the future of the country are called upon to address the issue of communal clashes and suggest ways for religions to conduct themselves in the pluralistic situation of India.

One of the basic facts to be taken into consideration is that Indian society is multi-religious and multi-cultural. The plurality of religious faiths has produced a diversity of communities with separate and distinctive identities, each religious community having its own creed, cult, pattern of conduct and culture. Each community has developed its own socio-political interests and this has often resulted in rivalry and inter-religious conflicts. This does not mean either that

plurality of faith is bad or that religions stand in the way of communal harmony. It is true that religions have become a source of strife in several parts of the world including India. But religions, if properly understood and followed can instead of disrupting inter-religious harmony, provide spiritual motivation towards building communal harmony.

During recent times Christians have been criticised for hampering peace and harmony in different parts of India. Some prominent Hindu leaders like the RSS chief Sudarshan alleged that Christian missions are indulging in forceful conversions of vulnerable sections in the Hindu community. Though Christian missions have denied the charges, atrocities against Christian community on the charge of coercive conversion from Hinduism to Christianity have created an unprecedented wedge in Indian society and polity. Most Christians think that violence against them has the tacit approval of the communal political party that controls the levers of power at the national level. It has to be admitted that historically Christianity has contributed to the rise of communalism and inter-religious rivalry in India. Wrong interpretations and practices of Christ's teachings followed by Christian missions and also certain formulations of Christian missiological concepts have produced narrow communalistic and exclusivist forms of Christianity, seeking to dominate over and displace other religions. The eighteenth and nineteenth century missionary movement had been an amorphous mixture of self-less service and a crusading spirit of expansion. It resulted in reproducing western model of Christianity in India. There were cases of voluntary conversion. But mere proselytizm or formal change of religion was the order of the day. Another irritant was that Christianity in India came to be viewed with suspicion and mistrust because of the association of Christian missions with the colonial and imperialist powers. The attempt to build a theology for the missions in consonance with the expansionist spirit also contributed to further complication. For example, the well-known theologian and missiologist Hendrik Kraemer in his famous address to the International Missionary Conference at Tambaram on the theme 'Christian message in a non-Christian World' emphasised the uniqueness of Christ, the necessity of the Church, and the obligation to proclaim the gospel to the whole world. Kraemer's interpretation made a negative judgment on native religions claiming his religion to be the right and the best one. This became the basis for Christian missionary approach to other faiths and resulted in a narrow and exclusivist approach to other religions in India<sup>1</sup>.

#### 2.2 The pluralistic situation

Pluralism in a society is the presence of more than one cultural identity among its population. It can be multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-lingual and other multi-cultural identities. It has been pointed out that, India is the world's most complex and comprehensive pluralistic society harbouring a vast variety of races, castes, communities, languages, customs and living styles.

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Hendrick Kraemer, <u>The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World</u> (London: The Edinburgh House Press, 1938) 61-141.

In a pluralistic situation it is possible for people either to build spiritual walls within which they may live in isolation from one another or to follow the path of aggression with a view to dominating others. Needless to say both these are not healthy attitudes. The only creative way out for humankind in the modern context of pluralism is; "for each religion, culture and ideology to recognize that people are in a situation of dialogical existence, and to explore the possibility of cooperation and pro-existence, without in the process losing its own ultimate spiritual basis"<sup>2</sup>.

Of course, the fact of religious pluralism raises many questions. Why so many different religions? What ought to be one's attitude towards other religions? Are all religions essentially the same or different? Such questions abound in a pluralistic situation.

Harold G. Coward opines that, religious pluralism is a special challenge facing world religions today<sup>3</sup>. As such religious pluralism is not a threat in itself. It is only when religions try to become exclusivist that problems arise. John Hick argues that, this basic conviction is to hold that, one particular religion contains the valid response to the divine. It alone holds the true beliefs concerning the nature of reality<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> M.M. Thomas, Risking Christ for the sake of Christ (Delhi: ISPCK, 1999) 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Harold G. Coward, <u>Pluralism: Challenge to World Religions</u> (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1996) 94.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> John Hick, God Has Many Names (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982) 88.

Paul F. Knitter observes that, one of the most pressing tasks confronting Christian theology today is of providing an account of existence and the renewed vitality of other religions<sup>5</sup>. Kuncheria Pathil too notes that, the discovery of other faiths and the question of their role in the universal salvific plan of God is the most serious challenge to contemporary Christian theology<sup>6</sup>.

In India there are a number of religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, Islam and Christianity. In addition to this there are also a variety of folk religions and tribal cultures. The diversity of expressions of the Christian faith also contributes to the pluralistic situation.

There was a time when Christianity held the view that there was no salvation outside the church. But today that position has been discarded by almost all established churches. They have learned to see truth and positive values in other faiths. There has also been a shift taking place in the conceptual understanding of church, and its mission in the world which is essentially pluralistic. Churches have understood that the colonial model of "imposition of one belief or ideology" on all people is no longer feasible. It is all the more applicable in the present socio-political situation of India. Hence search for a new models of

Paul F. Knitter, <u>NO OTHER NAME</u>? A critical survey of Christian attitudes towards the world Religions (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1985) 17.

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Kuncheria Pathil, "The new encounters with other faith", <u>Theology for our Times</u> June (1995): 64 -74.

Christian mission activities by taking seriously the challenges posed by the pluralistic situation of India is felt to be a pressing need of the time.

#### 2.3 Mission

The word mission is derived from the Latin word *Missio* which means send. In church circles missio Dei is the term used to denote mission. It treats mission as God's mission<sup>7</sup>. Christians believe that it is for the accomplishment of God's mission that Jesus came. Christian mission is, therefore, participation in God's mission as exemplified in the life and ministry of Jesus.

For grasping the nature and meaning of mission, Jesus' own interpretation of mission is to be evaluated. Jesus began his ministry by announcing the arrival of the Kingdom (St. Mark. 1:14-15). The Kingdom of God is foundational to Jesus' mission. Further he narrates what is mission in what is known as the Nazareth Manifesto (St. Luke 4:18-19). According to the Nazareth Manifesto, God's mission through Jesus Christ was good news to the poor, liberation from all forms of oppression and bondage and proclamation of the year of Lord's favour. The year of Lord's favour has reference to the jubilee year as described in chapter 25 of the book of Leviticus in the Old Testament which had been meant for the removal of all inequalities and the restoration of all to their ancestral family properties. Slaves were to be liberated and

Ken Gnanakan, Kingdom Concerns (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 1993) 35.

debts were to be cancelled. The accent in Jesus' interpretation of mission was on liberation from oppression and the removal of all forms of dehumanisation and the restoration of justice for all. The goal of mission, is thus, made unequivocally clear. God's Mission in Christ is not simply the conversion of individuals but the transformation of the corporate life of the whole community. For Jesus, God's reign is the starting point and context for mission<sup>8</sup>.

Most Christian mission groups and societies proclaim mission as God's and for them it extends to the whole of God's creation. It is not limited to one particular issue, community or religion. In a religiously plural society Christians together with their neighbours of other faiths, are called upon to participate in God's mission in the world. As S. J. Samartha says: "Mission is continuing activity through the spirit to mend the brokenness of creation to overcome the fragmentation of humanity and to heal rift between humanity, nature and God"<sup>9</sup>.

#### 2.4 Conventional missionary approach

The traditional view of mission consisted exclusively in preaching or spreading of the gospel, planting as many churches as possible and persuading native people to renounce their traditional religious affiliations and socio-cultural practices and to become 'true'

<sup>8</sup> DSenior and Stuhimueller, eds. <u>The Biblical Foundation for Mission</u> (New York: Orbis, 1983) 144.

S.J. Samartha, One Christ – Many Religions (Bangalore: SATHRI, 1994) 170.

Christians. 'True' here meant a westernised gentleman type. The image of Christ, which such missionary enterprises projected, was that of the crusading or imperial Christ out to conquer the world rather than that of God's servant Christ of the gospel always willing and eager to serve than to be served. Emperor Constantine's decision to give Christianity the status of official religion of the empire distorted the servant image of Christ and replaced it with Christ 'Rex'.

The Church and its mission never fully recovered from the Constantinian distortion. The Protestants also maintained the same tradition. Where as the Roman Catholic Church affirmed that there was no salvation outside the 'Church' the protestant model was that, out side the 'Word' there was no salvation<sup>10</sup>. The links maintained by Christian missions with the project of colonial expansion of the European nations further vitiated the relationship between Christian missions and the cultures of the people 'evangelised'.

#### 2.5 Meaning of conversion

Latin word conversio, which is the etymological root of the word conversion, means turning from carelessness to true piety<sup>11</sup>. The primary Biblical view of conversion is a change or turning around towards God. Conversion is a new orientation to the new way in contrast to the old; a turning around in a mental sense or the more literally used

David J. Bosch, <u>Transforming Mission: Paradigm shifts in Theology of missions</u> (New York: Orbis, 1991) 475.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Ìbid.

physical sense<sup>12</sup>. Arthur Darby Nock defines conversion as; "individual experimental phenomenon, chosen to belong to a new faith because of personal spiritual conviction"<sup>13</sup>. Bailey says, conversions are not confined to Christian religion. The process is the same in all religions. First recognition of the reality in personal idealism, then decision-acceptance and finally awakened creative activity<sup>14</sup>. The principle of assimilation seems to be active throughout the conversion process<sup>15</sup>.

In theoretical terms mission and conversion may be legitimate terms in the practice of religious faiths. Without conversion there would have been no organised religions-no Buddhism or Jainism and later on Sikhism in India, and no Christianity emerging out of Judaism in the first century. There have been Buddhist missions to Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand besides the whole of India 16. In India Hindu Gurus had Muslim disciples and Sufi saints had Hindu disciples 17. Religious refugees came and lived among Hindus without being disturbed either way in terms of faith. They were not alienated from their own culture and community life 18. Contrary to this, Christian missionary

V.Bailey Gillespie, <u>Religious Conversion and Personal Identity</u> (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1988) 16.

Arthur Darby Nock, "Towards a general theory of conversion in Religious change" in <u>Conversion and Culture</u> Lynette Olsam, ed. (Sydney: SASSC, 1986): 3.

Bailey Gillespie, op.cit.: 16.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Ibid.: 136.

Tara Chand, Short History of the Indian People (Calcutta: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1934) 64 - 65.

Samartha, op.cit: 169.

Jawaharlal Nehru, <u>The Discovery of India</u> (London: Meridian Books Limited, 1956) 49-50.

activities had made a disturbing and destabilising effect on the life of the society.

# 2.5.1 Conversion: Hindu perception

In Hinduism, religion is regarded as a matter of 'spiritual experience'. Consequently in none of its forms has Hinduism ever developed the idea of a community of believers<sup>19</sup>. Therefore, in Hinduism there can be no such thing as conversion. Spiritual enlightment is realised through disciplined living, in a mystic union with the absolute<sup>20</sup>. The position of Hinduism vis-à-vis conversion underwent a fundamental change during the last part of the nineteenth century. In response to the mass proselytizing attempts by Christian missions, the Arya Samaj introduced what is known as *Suddhi*-or reconversion of the converted Hindus back into their original Hindu faith. It has been pointed out by analysts that this is not in keeping with the Hindu ethos and might eventually lead to a sort of semitisation of Hinduism<sup>21</sup>.

## 2.5.2 Conversion: Christian understanding

Christian conversion, in essence, means experiencing God as one's innermost reality through the help-mediation-of Jesus and reorienting one's life in terms of that experience<sup>22</sup>. For some conversion

Joachin Wietzke, ed. P.D. Devanandan Vol. II (Madras: CLS, 1987) 16.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Ibid.: 17.

Romila Thapar, "Religion, Culture and Nation", <u>Seminar</u> 377, January (1991): 38-40 and Asish Nandy "Three Propositions", <u>Seminar</u> 402, February (1993): 15-16.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> K.P.Aleaz, <u>The Role of Pramanas in Hindu–Christian Epistemology</u> (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1993) 85.

is a supernatural event beginning to totally transform the personality (mind, emotion, self-perception, etc.) of the person(s) concerned and thereby producing a different understanding of ultimate reality, along with new beliefs, and norms of conduct. It involves a change in beliefs, group identifications and characteristics of personality; it also involves a complete reorganisation and reorientation in a person's emotional conditions and intellectual outlook<sup>23</sup>.

# 2.6 Conversion - Changing Christian perception

Christian perception of the idea of conversion has undergone a process of revolution over the years. In the beginning Christians had thought it their God given duty to convert as many as possible. But the exposure to other religions and cultures prompted and compelled them to re-examine their views on conversion; and they did it earnestly and in depth. It resulted in giving up the old notions and accepting a liberal view that accommodated other religions also as a valid means for Godrealisation. This change of perception is reflected in the writings of many Christian thinkers and theologians For example Wesley Ariarajha who was Director of the Dialogue unit of WCC<sup>24</sup> commented that Christians should consider religious plurality to be within God's purpose and pointed out that; "The Christian is called not to convert, but to witness. The burden of responding to the message is that of the hearers and not of those

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Ibid.: 85-86.

The WCC has a special department designed as unit for holding dialogue with other religions and other Christian denominations who are not members of the WCC

who proclaim"<sup>25</sup>. The Canberra Assembly of the WCC pointed to the need of Christ to be presented, interpreted and lived out in relation to indigenous spirituality<sup>26</sup>. A new holistic humanism integrating the mechanical materialistic, the organic ecological and the spiritual personal dimensions of human being has to emerge through dialogue between religions and secular ideologies and between religions<sup>27</sup>.

Kuncheria Pathil says, an attempt to change the social system along with mission is an important ideal today<sup>28</sup>. To this Dick Kooiman adds:

"Conversion in India should not be narrowed down to an individual moment of divine grace or a Gandhian change of heart; it is closely linked with social aspirations of groups that suffer from discrimination and oppression. For untouchable castes and communities a change of religion may serve as an idiom of social mobility"<sup>29</sup>.

In Dick Kooiman's view conversion has a personal as well as social aspect. On the other hand K.C. Vardhachari says: "Conversion is not an experience that entails the cutting of from the rest of the society

M.M. Thomas, <u>Church's Mission and Post-Modern Humanism</u> (New Delhi: CSS& ISPCK, 1996) 120.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Ibid.: 124.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Ibid.: 126.

Kuncheria Pathil, ed. <u>Mission in India Today</u> (Bangalore: Dharmaram, 1988) 306.

Dick Kooiman, <u>Conversion and Social Equality in India</u> (New Delhi: Manohar, 1989) 1-9.

to which one belonged, either to enter into another community or into his own solitariness for all religious experience"<sup>30</sup>. It consists in a double movement- turning away from love of oneself and turning to love of God. This love of God is correctly manifested in the love of the other. Love of the other takes particular care of the poor, unwanted and the oppressed. It promotes justice. It seeks to change the hearts and the structures that are causes of injustice and oppression<sup>31</sup>.

K.C. Abraham says that the earlier approach of mission was evangelism and conversion, but with the impact of religious resurgence, nationalism, ecumenism, globalisation and the threat posed by scientific and technological advancement, the boundaries of mission expanded. Today human society as a corporate unit, come in the orbit of Christian missions. The concern of social problems and the liberation from unjust structures have become part of Churches mission<sup>32</sup>.

NCCI the official forum of the non-catholic Churches in India also support the above view. It says:

"Christianity in India does not need more members. Numerical growth of the membership of the church has not brought any significant change in the life of the society. It is a small

J.R. Chandran & M.M. Thomas, eds. "The Hindu conception of Religious freedom", <u>Religious Freedom</u> (Bangalore: Committee for literature and social concern, 1956) 37.

Joseph Mattam & Sebastian Kim, eds. <u>Mission and Conversion: A Reappraisal</u> (Bombay: St. Paul, 1996) 43.

K.C.Abraham, <u>Liberative Solidarity</u> (Thiruvalla: CSS, 1996) 20.

minority within the Church, who, in the spirit of Christ ventures out to spread the good news through their humble life-style and service"<sup>33</sup>.

Though Churches do not support proselytizing efforts, many criticisms raised against Christian missions working in various parts of India are not without ground. In the multi-faith situation of India many of the conventional forms of Christian missions have to be changed if they are to be accepted.

The above cited views point to the imperative need for deepening our understanding of the basic postulates of all major religions and taking a critical look at the mission activities as we see them in today's India.

# 2.7 Niyogi commission report

It was against the background of strong anti-conversion sentiments brewing up all through the country that in 1954, the Madhya Pradesh government appointed a committee to investigate the charges of forced and coercive conversion into Christianity followed by Christian missions in the state particularly among the backward peoples and aboriginals. M.B. Niyogi a retired Chief Justice of Nagpur High court headed the Christian Missionary Activities Inquiry Committee. The committee published its findings in 1956.

S.K. Parmer, "Missiological function of the Church in India", NCCR Vol. CVII, No.4 April (1987): 219-220.

The conclusions of the Nivogi Commission are noteworthy. Some of the major complaints raised against Christian missions were that through the initiative of International Missionary Council, foreign missionary organisations using foreign money are doing mass conversion by means of educational, medical and evangelistic work. Conversions were mostly brought about by undue influences, misrepresentation etc. or in other words not by conviction but by inducements. Educational concessions such as free gifts of books were offered to secure the conversion of minors in the primary and secondary schools under the control of missions. They also used mass media for conversion<sup>34</sup>. Missionaries also involved themselves in extra religious and political activities. Loyalty to the country and solidarity of society were weakened and disrupted by conversion. Evangelism was a world policy to revive Christendom by re-establishing western supremacy and was not prompted by spiritual motives. Schools, Hospitals and orphanages were used as means to facilitate proselytism. Harijans and tribals were the special target of an aggressive evangelization<sup>35</sup>. The committee recommended legislative measures to prevent conversions. The main recommendations of the committee were like i) those missionaries whose primary object was proselytization should be asked to withdraw, ii) the use of medical or other professional services as a direct means of

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Blaise Levai, <u>The Role of Missions on Present Day India</u> (Madras: CLS, 1957) 276.
 M.B. Niyogi, Chairman's Report of the Christian Missionary Activities Enquiry

M.B. Niyogi, <u>Chairman's Report of the Christian Missionary Activities Enquiry Committee</u>, <u>Madhya Pradesh Vol. 1</u> (Madhya Pradesh: Government Printings, 1956) 4-5.

making conversions should be prohibited by law<sup>36</sup>. The report while disapproving proselytization, appreciated the educational and medical services rendered by Christian missions<sup>37</sup>.

The response of the Christian Churches to the report was, of course, mixed. But by any reckoning, the Niyogi Commission report was an indictment against Christian mission activities in India<sup>38</sup>.

#### 2.8 Christian mission activities: The present scenario

#### 2.8.1 From western to indigenous missions

As pointed out earlier during the first phase of the missionary movement the thrust was in replicating the western model of Christian life in India. Establishment of an indigenous Indian Church was not on their agenda; their aim was to save the souls from heathenism<sup>39</sup>. Missions evaluated their success merely on baptismal statistics rather than making converts genuine Christians. The foreign missionaries dominated the mission affairs. Michel Hollis pointed to this fact in the following words: "It was assumed that any missionary however junior and inexperienced, might be put in charge of any work. It was equally

Blaise Levai, op.cit: 276.

Ka Na Subramanyam, <u>Catholic Community in India</u> (Calcutta: Macmillan, 1970) 72.

Editorial Notes "The Niyogi Recommendations", NCCR Vol.LXXVI/10, October (1956): 368.

H.C. Perumalil & E.R. Hambye eds. <u>Christianity in India</u> (Alleppy: Prakasan Publications, 1972) 283-284.

assumed that he must be in charge, unless a senior missionary was there under whom he could work",<sup>40</sup>.

There was little consciousness or help for growth or hardly any effort to develop an indigenous ministry. Institutions and organisations were built with the financial assistance of Western Missionary Society without depending upon to the economic resources of Indian Christians. The Indian teachers and catechists were considered only as "native agents of Missions". Undue interference and dependence made the Indian Christian community to remain a potted plant alienated from the common soil of Indian society.

Knowing this drawback of excessive dependence on western patronage and their control over Indian mission affairs, many educated native Christians began to show feelings of discontent, suspicion and dislike towards European missionaries. By the end of the nineteenth century there were efforts from the side of some leading native Christians to build up a self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating mission. Kalicharan Banerjee, Parani Andi, V.S. Azariah, and K.T Paul were the pioneers to claim this Christian liberty to stand aloof from western cultural domination and reformulate indigenous mission in relation to the cultural heritage of this land. The National Church of Madras (1886), The Christo Samaj of Culcutta (1887), The Marthoma

A.M. Mundadan, <u>Indian Christians Search for Identity and Struggle for Autonomy</u> (Bangalore: Dharamaram Publications, 1984) 168.

Evangelical Association of Kerala (1888) the Hindu Church of the Lord Jesus in Tinnevelly (1903) were first attempts by Indian Christian community to create indigenous missions<sup>41</sup>.

Two major institutional expressions of indigenisation among the Protestant in the twentieth century are the NMS and the Christian Ashram Movement. The NMS was organised in 1905 by V.S Azariah, KT. Paul and others out of their belief that Indian Christians should have a share of their own in the evangelization of the country. Its objectives were to evangelise unevangelised areas in India and adjacent countries and to stimulate missionary zeal in the churches<sup>42</sup>. It was staffed by Indians, financed from Indian sources and organised on interdenominational basis. The native Christian leaders saw in NMS the beginning of a movement that might break the mission compound\* mentality of a Indian Christians and help to organise the Indian Christians community along indigenous lines<sup>43</sup>.

The Ashram is a very ancient institution in Indian religious tradition. Meditation and silence form the main features of it. As the idea of a life of withdrawal and meditation is part of Indian spiritual

Kaj Baago, <u>Pioneers of Indigenous Christianity</u> (Madras: CISRS &CLS, 1969)

C.B. Firth, <u>An Introduction to Indian Church History</u> (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1998) 254.

<sup>\*</sup> Mission Compound Mentality literally means Christian converts shutting themselves in Mission Bungalow of a missionary probably a foreign missionary surrounded themselves with a few submissive mission dependents.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> H.C. Perumalil & E.R. Hambye, op.cit.: 288.

tradition it is quite familiar to the Indian mind and therefore it has considerable popular appeal. The common element in these Ashrams is a simple community life of an Indian type with a regular provision for prayers and devotion and members giving their service in schools or hospital and doing community work. Ashram movement among the Christian community in India is of fairly recent origin and there are several ashrams under different denomination in different parts of India. The Indian Christians who were looking for ways of Christian witness and service in keeping with the tradition of Indian spirituality found an answer in the Ashram way of life and work. The year 1921 saw the beginning of a Christu Seva Sangham Ashram in Pune by Fr. J.C. Winslow, Christu Sishya Ashram at Thadakoum by Bishop Pakenham Walsh.

Indigenous missions had a great vision about mission work. But unfortunately they could not develop into a great movement due to various reasons, particularly the lack of committed leaders. Many societies died a quiet death, others defunct, though existing only in name<sup>44</sup>. It is into this gap that the aggressive evangelizing mission groups stepped in.

# 2.8.2 The contemporary situation: An overview

As per Indian Missions Association statistics there are nearly 100 mission groups working in different parts of India. Most of them

Eddy Asirvatham, <u>Christianity in the Indian Crucible</u> (Calcutta: YMCA publishing House, 1955) 64-92.

Pentecostals who are breakaway groups from mainstream Churches. Their declared objective is evangelization of India. These groups get substantial amount of money from foreign countries as aid. The mission activities of these groups can be divided into three categories. (1) Religious (2) Social (3) Humanitarian. The Religious activities are personal evangelism, village evangelism, gospel crusades, film ministry, distribution of Bible, and training of missionaries, conducting retreats and counselling and planting Churches. Social activities include starting educational and vocational schools, distribution of medical aid, establishing orphanages, organising adult literacy programmes, running children and girls hostel, and providing sponsorship for clothes, housing, education and medical care to children and widows. Humanitarian activities include providing funds for relief (food, clothes, hut building) to people affected by natural calamities, cattle for the poor, helping villagers in income generating projects like fishery, community health programme like eye clinic, immunization, family planning, disease control. The tribals and low caste Hindus are attracted towards such mission activities. In many cases the poor and the out castes embrace Christianity not because of any spiritual motivation but for social and economic betterment. Hindu militant groups allege that, Christian missions through their social and charitable activities are weaning large number of gullible people from the Hindu community and that this is done with the help of foreign funds. To counter this, Hindu groups too started emulating the welfare programmes of Christian missions saying that the mission activities are

a threat to their religion and culture. Evangelizing Christian groups on the other hand allege that after Hindutva forces-read BJP-took control of the government of India there has been a conscious effort to curtail the religious freedom assured by the Indian constitution. There is even clamour for a ban on conversion activities. But the fact is that, activities of the fast multiplying Evangelizing Christian groups all over India give a handle to the Hindutva organisations to attack Christians and oppose all kinds of mission activities vehemently.

#### 2.8.3 Evangelization crusades

Evangelization of India is often spoken of as the 'Unfinished task' by the Catholic, Protestant churches and also Pentecostal groups. Evangelization crusades have been launched under various name like Evangelization 2000, Evangelization Decade, Operation World, AD 2000 & Beyond, by different Churches and Christian organisations internationally to carry on massive proselytization of non-Christians keeping 2000 AD as target year. Even the Roman Catholic Church seems to be in line, going by what their Pontiff states:

"As the year 2000 approaches, our world feels an urgent need for Gospel. Perhaps we feel this need precisely because the world seems to be distancing itself from the Gospel, or rather because the world has not yet drawn near to the Gospel. The first case-the move away from this Gospel-is particularly true

Louis Bush "Project North West 2000-AD 2000 and Beyond" Published by Church Growth Monitoring Cell, Operation Agape, Ludhiana 2000: 1-11.

of the "old world", especially of Europe; the second is true of Asia, the fareast and Africa"<sup>46</sup>.

Christian evangelical and Pentecostal groups based mainly in the US and who have established an insistent presence in India see the whole India as a vast over-ripe harvest field. They send urgent calls through pamphlets and news bulletins to 'reap the harvest before it is too late'. These Christian organisations have a list of villages 'that are eagerly waiting for the Gospel'. They have projects and goals like 'adopt your own village in India', 'plant a Church a Day', plant 100 village churches by 2000 and seek sponsors in India and abroad for church planting. These fast multiplying Christian sects, most of them having their financial and ideological roots in the US, are now attempting to become the prime proselytisers. Their intolerant attitude to local cultures, to other religions in India, their aims and methods, the languages they use are understandably perceived as challenge to Hindu cultural identities. Hindu fundamentalist groups feel it their duty to resist these Christian groups nibbling at the Hindu society. This often results in communal tensions at different part of the country<sup>47</sup>.

To counter the Christian evangelization attempts are made to bring back converted Hindus back to the Hindu fold. Serious apprehensions are expressed by well-meaning persons, as is evidenced

John Paul II, <u>Crossing the Threshold of Hope</u> Translated by Messori Vittorio (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994) 117.

Saira, Menezes and Venu Menon, "The Zealots who would inherit", <u>OUTLOOK</u> February 22, 1999: 18-20.

by the spurt of critiques on evangelization. The Hindu nationalist apprehension can be summoned as: "evangelization in India appears to be a part of the uniform world policy to revive Christendom for reestablishing western supremacy or that the objective is apparently to create Christian minority pockets with a view to disrupt the solidarity of the non-Christian societies".

# 2.9 Why Christian mission groups are concentrating their activities in North India's tribal belt?

A glance at the demographic profile of the Christian population in India will be of some practical value here. The national average of Christians is officially 2.34 % according to 1991 census. IMA<sup>49</sup> says the Christian population of North India is 0.55% of the total population. Missionaries both within and outside India have long noticed the meagre and disorganised Christian presence in North India's Hindi belt even after 200 years of active Christian evangelization. This enthused every evangelical missionary movement to plant church among every unreached people group as part of world evangelization movement.

Secondly Christian missions place the tribal belt of North-India within the 'unfinished task' of evangelization. AD 2000 & Beyond is the world wide evangelical movement which co-ordinates the work on

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> Solomon Dorai Swamy, <u>Christianity in India</u> (Madras: CLS, 1985) 99.

IMA is a Christian agency founded in 1977 in order to co ordinate and provides status of Christian work among unreached Dalit groups in India. I.M.A research team follows sources in the volumes of "People of India" by K.S. Singh.

such areas of the world where people have not come under the influence of the gospel. Among the unreached people of the world, North India's Hindi belt is focused as a core area. Every evangelical group is activated to take part in the great unfinished task of world evangelization by forming a Church for every people and the Gospel for every person by the year 2000<sup>50</sup>.

Thirdly this area of India is also known as the heart land of Hinduism. It is the birthplace of both Buddhism and Jainism. Some of the most revered Hindu and Buddhist shrines and places of pilgrimage are in this region. Muslims too have a strong presence with some of their most important worship centres. To a missionary enthusiast the Hindu teachings and the Hindu world are the most perverted, most monstrous, most implacable, and this part of the world is the demon invaded part of this planet. The cure and remedy of this disorder is the light of gospel for them. Hence Church planting efforts are accentuated to save Hindu soul, from perishing.

Fourthly this is one of the most illiterate regions of the world. 40% of the total Indian population lives here. According to IMA research statistics the conditions of health, education, diet and drinking water among this regions' backward class people are rated as poor. This area is also the most socially backward in all of India. This social

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Refer <u>IET SILVER JUBILEE SOUVENIR</u>: 10-12 & <u>It is Happening</u> (Published by GFA) "Spiritual Awakening in the Hindi Belt", March/April 1997, <u>It is Happening</u> "Renaissance in the Graveyard of Missions", March 1996.

backwardness opens up opportunities for missions to work among the deprived classes and for their socio-economic cultural and educational development and through that spread the massage of the gospel and eventually conversion.

# 2.9.1 The agenda of Christian missions working in parts of Orissa and Madhya Pradesh.

With a view to investigate the working of Christian missions, the states of Madhya Pradesh and Orissa are selected for case study because these are the two regions where the largest number of making efforts evangelical/mission groups are concerted at proselytization. The reason why they concentrate on these regions is nothing but the fact that these are the most backward regions in India economically and socially. IET, FMPB, GFA, IPC, AG, Christ for India, IEHC, OM, South India Soul Winners Association, NMS, Brethren Missionary Society, IEM, CNI, Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Church, India Outreach Mission, India Campus Crusade for Christ, Evangelical Church of India, Baptist Church, New life Ministry, The Village Evangelization of Indian Mission etc. are some of the prominent Mission groups and churches active in the area.

During last few years local churches and evangelical organisations are making combined efforts to reach out to 6,00,000 of Indian villages with gospel with nearly 200 plans for Evangelization of India focusing the year 2000. The American organisation AD 2000 & Beyond co-ordinates the whole evangelization activity terming it as

'The Unfinished Task' igniting every missionary heart with the goal: 'a church for every people and the Gospel for every person'. Planting 'a church for every people' is a task that is already well underway by some evangelical groups who envisage evangelization of India. The following evangelical groups have taken the challenge for evangelizing India.

- a) FMPB has developed 'Hindi Heart land penetration strategies to mobilise 1500 new missionaries to reach and evangelise 300 unreached people groups before the year 2003<sup>51</sup>.
- b) The GFA has a Church planting movement targeting the un reached in Asia. They are sending out 1,00,000 workers into the ripe harvest fields of Asia from 28 training centres by AD 2000<sup>52</sup>.
- c) The IEHC have a plan called 'Final Thrust-5000' which is to saturate India with the Gospel with the aim of planting village churches (Christ groups) at least in half of India's 6,00,000 of villages by 2000 AD through native missionaries of 5000<sup>53</sup>.
- d) Christ for India is an evangelical group, which fund and oversee a daily evangelism and church planting work to the unreached

Friends Focus Published by FMPB September 1999. & It is Happening "Reaping a Bountiful Harvest Field", July/ August 1996

<sup>52 &</sup>lt;u>It is Happening Editorial May/June 1996. & It is Happening</u> "Penetrating the Impenetrable Kingdom", January/ February 1997

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> <u>Prayer News Bulletin</u> Published by IEHC, September 1993.

villages of India. Their goal is to 'plant a church a day' targeting 4,80,000 unreached villages in India<sup>54</sup>.

- e) OM India has launched an initiative called 'project Light' to present the gospel through literature to 100 million people in India by the year 2000.
- f) IET is the largest indigenous church-planting mission in India. It has mission fields in all over North India and had claimed planting 2000 Churches by 2000 A.D. Now they aim at planting 7777 churches by 2010 AD as their millennium vision<sup>55</sup>.

# 2.10 Mission activities in the tribal villages of Bastar, Bilaspur and Raipur of Madhya Pradesh Raigada and Phulbani of Orissa: Findings of the case studies

Madhya Pradesh and Orissa are states where religious conversions are banned by law. Converts can be baptized only with the permission of the Magistrate. Though baptisms are restricted considerable number of tribal people join to mainstream churches and evangelical fellowships without registering their change in faith. It is seen that there is a substantial increase in the number of believers at every fellowships. But some groups have reported depletion in numbers

IET News letter 2000, January. <u>FAITH TODAY</u> Vol.V, No.3, March 1998. <u>FAITH TODAY</u> Vol. VIII, No. 8 August 1999. <u>FAITH TODAY</u> Vol. X, No.10, October 1999.

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It is Happening "The Gospel Triumphs", January/ February 1998. FAITH TODAY (Published by IET) Vol. IV, No.12, December 1997. FAITH TODAY Vol.V, No.11, November 1998. FAITH TODAY Vol.V, No.1, January 1998.

of conversions due to opposition from Hindu organisations and missions during last 2 or 3 years.

The villages of this region are tribal dominated, under developed and illiterate. The villagers show more interest in wandering in forest and tending the cattle. They depend on agriculture for their living. Most of them are bonded labourers. The children scarcely go to school. Some missions run schools and children-homes and poor tribals send their wards to mission institutions. The IET mission runs a children's home in Bastar and 200 children are given free education and other facilities. Most children in the villages suffer from malnutrition and infant death rate is very high in these villages. Child mortality per 1000 birth is 200 in Phulbani district and 133 in Koraput district of Orissa<sup>56</sup>. Hospitals run by Gossner Mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and Catholic mission are the medical agencies for relief of the sick. Fatal epidemic like diarrhoea, jaundice and brain fever are frequent ailments in these tribal villages. The tribal villages practice witchcraft and many people approach traditional village healers for curing ailments.

Though the educational institutions and hospitals managed by Christian missions are used by all sections of people including the higher caste Hindus, they oppose what may be called religious activities by these Christian groups. The general mood prevailing in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> IMA People Profile Volume III Orissa, 1995: 34.

the villages is against conversion. It was reported that converted Christian tribals were tortured by Hindu zealots and locked up by police on false complaints. Some mission groups have trained native people as evangelists through their Bible Training schools for propagating gospel to non-Christians. Conducting open air preaching, praying for divine healing, conducting Sunday school classes, distribution of Gospel tracts, Bible portion and conducting prayer cells are some of their activities. In certain interior villages these evangelists conduct evangelistic meeting and show gospel films. Often this has led to sporadic persecution of missionaries and mob attacks on prayer meeting by Hindu militant groups chanting their opposition to Christianity calling it 'foreign religion'.

Unlike the mainstream churches in India these evangelical groups do not have the support of any mainstream political parties, religious or socio-cultural organisations. Most of them are breakaway factions from the mainstream churches. These groups float fellowships, gather some illiterate people, photograph and videotape them and send them abroad seeking funds. Refuting allegations of spiritual seductions by way of finance, most of the evangelical pastors say that they preach, but don't induce. They help people financially, some people join but many don't. It was said that no particular group is targeted. The claim that Brahmins and Muslims were among those converted was found to be untrue. Similarly the claim of an alarming number of people accepting Christianity is also not borne out by facts. It is a case of clear exaggeration. May be it was to claim more funds from their patrons

abroad or it may due to competitive evangelism among evangelical groups to claim superiority.

#### 2.10.1 IET and their main activities

IET is the largest indigenous church-planting mission in India having its work all over North India. Their object is to 'reach the un reached at any cost' with the aim to plant 2000 churches by 2000 A.D. It was said that in the predominantly tribal Bastar division of Madhya Pradesh they started work at Jagadalpur in 1986 with 10 workers and by 1998 it reached 136. They have established 123 churches "saved" 1100 souls and baptised 500 people<sup>57</sup>. Mission functionaries say the figures are almost similar in all North Indian states. The statistics shown below substantiate the large-scale conversions and enormous work done towards its church-planting mission in North India<sup>58</sup>.

Year	No. of Mission field started	No. of evangelist sent	No. of souls won	No. of Baptism	No. of souls Baptised with Holy spirit	
1995	162	141	9659	230 7	2069	
1996	152	133	12079	30 45	2075	
1997	211	249	18376	5641	6556	
1998	358	210	29887	8818	4561	
1999	749	237	25065	9298	9254	

IET and claims that it aims to plant 7777 churches by 2010 A.D.

<sup>57</sup> Conversion Statistics and Church growth report quoted from <u>IET SILVER</u> JUBILEE SOUVENIR.

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Church growth report quoted from IET News letter 1999 December & <u>FAITH TODAY</u> Vol. IX, No.9, September 1999.

# 2.10.2 The various ministries of IET and how they work

## i) Church planting

Sends out two workers each to the unreached villages, wins souls for Jesus and establishes satellite churches to sustain the believers spiritually. With the increase of believers a main church is established<sup>59</sup>. At present they have nearly 900 congregations and hundreds of church planting preaching points.

# ii) Bible training centres

There are 11 short-term training centres and a Bible College for IET in India. At Bastar there is a training centre for training evangelists for village evangelization.

#### iii) Village evangelism

Evangelists who have completed training to this villages are sent to un-reached villages to find preaching points. They distribute tracts and Bible portions. Interested people are invited to attend prayer meetings in a house then a prayer cell is formed. Eventually a church is planted.

 Main Church or Congregation: - A regular gathering of believers ii) Satellite Church: A regular weekly gathering of believers (other than Sundays) iii) Prayer Cells:- An occasional prayer meeting or preaching point. Refer <u>FAITH TODAY</u> Vol. IV, No.10, October 1997.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> Christian gatherings are defined under three headings.

#### iv) Film ministry

As most of the members of the target groups are illiterate, distribution of tracts or gospels is not useful. It is to reach out to them that the gospel film ministry is intended. Evangelists carry projectors to the villages and show the films like *Daya Sagar*, which depicts the story of Jesus in Hindi language. At the end people are called for personal commitment. Hundreds of villages have so far been evangelised in this way. IET says even churches have been established in place as a result of this ministry

#### v) Schools and children homes

Schools have been started with the aim of providing primary education to tribals' the children. In the Children's home Sunday school classes, Hygienic lessons and general awareness topics are taught.

# vi) Counselling

Poor people languishing in despair and hopeless situations are given counselling based on the Bible. Evangelists visit this people and will try their best to redress the grievances through different means.

#### 2.10.3 IEHC and their main activities

EHC is an American organisation working for presentation of a printed message of Jesus Christ to every house in India<sup>60</sup>. IEHC has

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> Prayer News Bulletin IEHC March 1993, May 1993, June 1993, July 1993.

envisaged the biggest outreach plan for harvest of the souls and saturate India with the Gospel. FT-5000 (final thrust) is designed for it. 5000 missionaries are entrusted with a specific daily schedule to operate, visiting every village by 2000 A.D. on a bicycle. According to B.A.G. Prasad, Executive Director, EHC south Asia, the best conveyance for the FT-5000 missionary is a bicycle. He appealed to every Christian to sponsor to buy bicycles for the missionaries thus saving 60% of their travel time which could be invested in soul winning and continue to say that this appeal is on behalf of the millions groping in darkness that individuals families churches and Christian organisations join hands to win this ancient land of ours to be presented back to the one to whom it belongs our lord Jesus Christ<sup>61</sup>.

# i) Bible correspondence course (BCC)

IEHC offers Bible correspondence course 'The way to a happy life' to all who respond to the gospel. It is a comprehensive course dealing with the simple way of salvation

# ii) Christ groups

Christ groups are prayer cells of all those who have accepted Jesus Christ as their personal saviour and Lord through personal evangelism and seekers conferences. Non-Christians also participate regularly in these groups. These members meet regularly for spiritual edification and non-Christians are trained to sing Christian songs, pray

Prayer News Bulletin IEHC September 1993, January 1994 & April 1994.

for one another and study the word of God to be effective witnesses. Missionary sources said that there is no compulsion from their side to convert people. Baptism is given only when the new believers insist. Converts are generally attached to the nearby evangelical Church. Christ Groups are found to be the main functionaries of evangelism in both the cities and rural areas of India.

#### iii) Church planters training institute (CPTI)

There are 8 training institutes for adequate training for field missionaries under FT-5000. The emphasis of their training is personal evangelism leading the people to understand the values of things of God and thus gradually win souls for the Lord Jesus Christ. They are also taught to take care of new converts in Christ and also to develop their understanding gradually and steadily. Besides classroom training the trainee missionaries are sent out daily into the highways, parks and teashops to apply what they learn in the classroom. After training the missionaries are finally placed on the field to 'saturate' the area with the gospel and also to form a satellite church or prayer cell, which are called Christ groups.

## iv) Adult literary programme (ALP)

In addition to the soul winning activity they have adult literacy programme in Orissa, West Bengal and North East India. Rev. Eric Leach and some Australian friends sponsor the ALP work in Orissa. IEHC adopts villages through Adult Literacy Centres at different places. There are 15 such centres in Orissa. During 1999 some have been closed due

to opposition from RSS workers. The ALP centres at Raigada and Phulbani have 60 students and they have been taught to read and write and do some simple mathematics. Their life style has changed such as maintaining cleanliness in their homes and surroundings, establishing good relationship with each other, stop speaking bad languages etc. They have learnt how to greet people and respect them. This has also brought a qualitative change in their social, economical, physical and spiritual life as well as health and hygienic etc. Several people have given up their bad habits such as smoking, drinking, using tobacco etc. The sick people who used to go to witch doctor now have started going to hospital. It was said that besides this, the ALP students have cultivated the habits of learning and participating in public meeting and taking active part in it. Those interested to do mission work are given training at CPTI to start winning souls from the village they hail from.

In Orissa there is strong opposition to and even murderous attacks on missionaries. This is increasing daily as this state is growing as a target point for the anti-Christian forces. There are reports of forcible reconversion of Christians in remote villages where their numbers are few. Due to strong opposition from Hindu militant organisations, IEHC missionaries unwillingly stopped their regular visits to villages. It was also reported that villagers are not responding enthusiastically as before. An analysis of the conversion statistics published by IEHC substantiates this.

(From January to August)\*

Year	Village visited	Tract distributed	Homes reached	Persons contacted	Response Received	BCC sent	Souls won	Baptism	Christ groups formed
1998	612	47256	58882	42387	10484	8083	440	88	23
1999	147	74873	36168	16199	2735	1849	106	4	6

Also IEHC has special ministry among college students, hospital patients and inmates of prisons. Special tracts are prepared for each category.

#### 2.10.4 IEM and their main activities

IEM is an evangelical missionary movement with an objective to 'reach the un reached', to plant a church among every people group there by presenting the gospel to every person thus motivating the reached to be actively involved in world Evangelization. They work among 70 people groups based in 51 mission stations in India. The missionaries involve in various kinds of ministries such as personal evangelism & Church planting, Bible translation, literacy programme, health care work, community development, child development,

<sup>\*</sup> Conversion statistics quoted from IEHC region wise F.T. progress report 1998 and 1999 Orissa and West Bengal. <u>Prayer News Bulletin</u> January 1999 issue for Orissa, West Bengal and North East India. ALP Report of Orissa.

missionary training and communication through literature and audiovisuals<sup>62</sup>.

#### i) Village evangelism

IEM started their ministry at Bastar in 1978. Evangelism and church planting constitute the main ministry. During 1998 there were 590 baptism altogether and the largest number of baptism (212\*) was in Bastar. Converts are baptised into CNI and Methodist Church. In the Bastar district IEM missionaries work among Bhatra, Mahar and Madiya tribes. Most of the tribal people practice agriculture and they have festivals associated with their agriculture cycle. They celebrate festivals for pleasing the sun and rain gods. Various contagious diseases are common in this area. Malaria, dysentery, diarrhoea and TB are common illness. Infant mortality is very high due to bad hygiene. Poverty prevent most often from going for treatment. Witch doctors have a prominent roll in these villages. IEM nurses and trained Health workers give medical care through clinics. Village health workers (VHW) visit villages to conduct community health work with stress on preventive steps<sup>63</sup>.

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OUT REACH (Monthly Magazine of IEM) "Waiting patiently watching attentively working continuously", Vol.XXXVI No.7 September 2001. OUT REACH "God is Building His Church", Vol.XXXV No.1 FEB/MAR 2001.

Baptism statistics quoted from IEM Annual Report 1998.

OUT REACH "Our understanding and responsibility", Vol.XXXII No.11 November 1998. OUT REACH "Ministry through Believers", Vol.XXXIII No.4 April 1999. OUT REACH "Stewardship of People", Vol.XXXIII No.6 June1999. OUT REACH "Rebuilding God's People", Vol.XXXV No.3 April 2001.

Gospel needs to be communicated in spoken language that varies from place to place-believe the IEM. The missionaries' first task is to carry out a linguistic survey to determine which is the most widely understood form of language. On the basis of the survey the missionaries will learn and analyse the dialect. Gospel tracts are translated and printed in this language. Literacy classes were held. This was aimed to make the unreached people read and write. Missionaries reach remote villages using bullock carts, two wheelers, tractors, buses or on foot. Reaching some of the villages is really very difficult. The missionaries in these areas live in jungle, identify with the tribals and eat what they serve in their huts. They will reach out to many sick and needy people and will tell them that, only Jesus can heal and bring freedom from the bondage of sin and fear. Many tribals listen when they talk about the love of God and gospel and ask them to accept Jesus Christ into their lives as Saviour.

# ii) Community health care work

Community health is one of the major mission activities of IEM. There are base clinics as well as mobile clinics. IEM will train local people as village health workers and these village health workers will act as the contact persons for IEM missionaries in a particular local area. This health workers are involved with health promotion, advising and educating families especially mothers. Men are asked to give up bad habits like betel and tobacco chewing, drinking alcohol, smoking and so on. These village health workers are key person to reach most of the

tribal people. This is followed up with the gospel being clearly presented to the people. Missionary sources have testified that, their primary purpose through health work is to help the tribals' understand God's plan of salvation for them. The role of medical work is secondary. After getting the tribal peoples' trust the missionaries educate them. But the point to note is, only few tribals changed their old beliefs. Missionaries sincerely pray for them and visit villages regularly for their conversion. Missionaries construct borewells, supply motor pumps, build houses and run hostels for the benefit of the villagers<sup>64</sup>.

In the village Makhogoan in Bastar district there are around 35 people who regularly attend Sunday worship. Once these local tribals were victims of numerous vices and evil practices. Witch doctors never allowed them to come up in life. They were suppressed and under privileged. The message of the gospel showed light to many and their life style changed. However there were threats from the local Hindus. Some converted tribals were implicated and some were excommunicated from their families and religions. Believers were forcibly taken away and threatened with death. They were compelled to follow their old faith.

In some villages the opposition was from high caste people. Opposition mounted when high caste families believed and confessed their change in faith. This new converts refuse to follow their age long old

OUT REACH "Working together to build HIS CHURCH", Vol.XXXV No.11 November 2000.

traditions and customs. The village leaders were up against IEM missionaries and accused them of spoiling family relationship with their new religion. Vandals were hired to attack missionaries and some missionaries were forced to leave their villages.

All the ministries of IEM work together to fulfil the purpose of taking the gospel to the unreached groups of people so that prayer cells are established among every people. Towards this goal IEM recruit more missionaries for church planting and health care. Missionaries encourage baptism from native people but there was no force on anyone 65. Basically when Christian service is done missions except the benefactors to join their fold. Generally this mission mentality of commercialising mission service for adding number is the main drawback that has fall upon Christian mission activities in India.

# 2.11 Why tribals and other backward classes are attracted to Christianity?

The study was conducted in the following areas: Bastar, Bilspur, Jagadalpur, Raipur and Sihora in Madhya Pradesh and Raigada, Phulbani and Khariar Road in Orissa. In addition to the Catholic and protestant Churches there are more than twenty evangelical mission groups active in the tribal dominated Bastar district. Leaders of Hindu organisations, pastors of some evangelical

OUT REACH "Unreached People Groups", Vol. XXXIV No.1&2 January-February 2000.

Churches and Christian converts were interviewed for their views. The following conclusions could be arrived at as a result.

- 1. The missions have started schools and hostels, dispensaries, kindergartens and various income generating programmes. Most of the missions were evangelical. These missions mainly cultivate relationships with the local people, listen to their woes, sympathise in their difficulties, teach certain (do and don't do) and persuaded them to join the prayer group. Compassion is their basic approach. Prayer for the sick and health care are used to attract the tribals to join the prayer cells. Some missions as part of their welfare programmes also provide help in the form of loans, pump sets, money for education of children and for buying seeds for cultivation. Churches and evangelical groups appoint newly converts to work as pastors with salary. These are some of the reasons for non-Christians accepting Christianity.
- 2. Most of the converts accept Christianity not necessarily of personal conviction that Jesus Christ is the only Saviour. In their homes they keep picture of Jesus along with Hindu deities. The conversions are mainly on the hope of better social life, freedom from caste hierarchies, hoping for better education for children, which helps job prospects, better health care etc.

- 3. The sympathetic approach of pastors and missionaries during diseases, prayer during crisis and help in day-to-day problems attract them and even motivated them to change their religion.
- 4. The converts' standard of living has improved. They have started wearing clean clothes, keeping their surroundings neat and tidy and their life style changed. Moreover it was reported by mission sources that there are doctors, lawyers and government servants from among Christian tribals while non-Christian still struggle to survive. This difference is mainly due to influence of Christian missions' educational endeavours and help. This is an added attraction for non-Christians to join Christian fold.

# 2.12 Why Hindu groups oppose Christian missionary activities?

The major reason why Hindu activist groups respond violently to Christian missions is proselytization that is seeking converts for Christ mainly from backward tribal areas. Hindu organisations allege that missionaries are using inducements to convert ignorant tribals from their Hindu faith.

Secondly, the missionaries advise the new converts to give up worship of the Hindu deities, which tribals used to worship from their birth. Their participation in traditional religio-cultural celebration has declined. Most missionaries say: 'you cannot worship two gods. You cannot be a Hindu as well as a Christian'. Missionaries denounce and proscribe indigenous religious practices related to marriage and death.

The missionaries insisted that if one became a Christian one should not participate in Hindu festivals or worship other gods. This creates friction at village and family levels. Some times certain Christian families stop contributing or participating in tribal festivals. Such behaviour of a few in a small village of 60 or 50 households isolates them and creates rupture in the social fabric. So the Hindu militants oppose Christian missions.

Thirdly, missionaries through their proselytizing activities may succeed in converting one or two members of a family. It is alleged that missionaries through these converted members try to influence other members of the family. This creates tension within families and eventually led to intervention by Hindu organisations. Hindu tribals worship many gods as their deities. Those who became Christians in a family throw away Hindu deities and village people get divided and invite intervention of Hindu leaders, which often accentuates communal rivalry.

Fourth reason for tension is related to identity. It is alleged that Christian tribals hide their religious identity to get government jobs reserved for Hindu Schedule tribes. Hindu activists provide necessary information to instigate violence against Christian tribals.

Fifthly, Christian evangelists insult Hindu saints and gods through leaflets published by evangelical groups. This provokes violent response from Hindu groups.

Lastly, through the missionary programmes for educating tribals, missions boost their social awareness. They are concientised and exhorted to stand up and speak against caste exploitation. This is perceived as a threat by the Hindu upper class. Hence the reaction of caste Hindus against Christian missions lead to tension in the tribal dominated villages.

More than 150 attacks on Christians have been reported during 1998 and 1999. Many of the attacks have been carried out by militant Hindu groups. In January 1999 an Australian Baptists missionary, Graham Staines and his two sons were burnt alive. Staines had worked with leprosy patients in India for 34 years. Hindu groups alleged Staines's involvement in conversion of tribals. Conversion by allurement is now the big problem before Christian community.

Catholic and Protestant churches have promoted dialogue with Indic religions respecting them saying that there are 'seeds of truth' in all. But the policies of the evangelical and Pentecostal groups' were different. Their theology, outlook and understanding of salvation are different and so are their missionary methods. Hence their activities provide a lever to those vested interests seeking to frustrate true mission work <sup>66</sup>. Evangelicals and Pentecostal groups' belief in exclusive God experience make them feel that only those who follow their precepts and practices will be saved. Hence the call for conversion.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>66</sup> Binoy K. John, "Merchants of Faiths", <u>INDIA TODAY</u> June 16, 1997: 84-87.

There are two ways of doing the mission activities. One by the way of deculturisation i.e., by mere change of faith of natives which the evangelical missions have adopt and the other way is of giving the gospel of love by understanding local culture and serving. To the evangelicals when they serve or help there is a feeling that some day the recipients of mission services will join their fold severing their previous ties. All their mission activities are aimed at wining souls and increase in the number of believers. The other mission approach is giving sacrificially what one has for the benefit of the society without expecting anything in return.

Real mission is hard and ceaseless toil in the service of the people without counting the results or the costs. What a missionary shared in common is: "a love for the poor, a love for India and a love for their Lord". Mother Theresa has said: "Love, to be true, must be for our neighbour. They need our hands to serve them and our hearts to love them. And this love must come from self-sacrifice and be felt until it hurts". In this spirit of service there is no longer the need of expecting reward or counting of souls saved and baptism.

As the sea of poverty and deprivation engulf vast chunk of the Indian population the services rendered by missionaries cannot be under estimated, although what various mission groups do in the tribal and other villages of India do not correspond fully the spirit of the

Georges Goree and Jean Barbier, eds. <u>Mother Teresa of Calcutta</u> (London: Collins, 1988) 55.

above message, of either Gandhi or C.F.Andrews or Mother Theresa. They, by their own admission, are hankering after human souls, waiting and wailing for Salvation.

As we saw, the main actors in the contemporary communal build up probed in this study are the evangelizing Christian mission groups and the militant Hindutva organisations. The purpose of the present study is to suggest a non-provocative and acceptable model or method of work for Christian missions in India. The model proposed by Gandhi is suggested as a viable and valid method for Christian mission activities in a pluralistic context. It requires to place the Gandhian model in proper perspective and in order to do this it is necessary, first to have some familiarity with the history of Christianity and Christian missions in India, followed by a perceptive understanding of the impact of the missions on the socio-cultural life of the land and of the responses they evoked from various quarters. In the following chapters, therefore, an attempt is made to trace in brief, the history of Christianity and Christian missions in India and how the pioneers of the Hindu renaissance responded to Christian presence and also Christian mission activities.

# **HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS IN**

# **INDIA**

3.1	The origin of Christianity in India
3.2	The Syrian tradition
3.3	Socio-cultural life of St. Thomas Christians
3.4	The Portuguese intrusion
3.5	Portuguese - St. Thomas Christian interface
3.6	St. Francis Xavier and Jesuit mission
3.7	Robert De Nobil and the Madurai Mission
3.8	The Mogul Mission
3.9	Portuguese missions: An assessment
3.10	The Protestant Mission
	3.10.1 The first Protestant mission

#### CHAPTER THREE

#### HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS IN INDIA

This chapter proposes to give a brief survey of the history of Christian missions in India, shedding light on the origin of Christianity in India, the arrival of Portuguese and Protestant missions into the country and their agenda to Christianize India.

#### 3.1 The origin of Christianity in India

There are two views among scholars about the origin of Christianity in India. According to one, the foundation of the Christian church in India was laid by Saint Thomas, one of the twelve Apostles of Jesus. The other view would ascribe the arrival of Christianity in India to the enterprise of Christian merchants and missionaries belonging to the East Syrian and Persian churches. But it has been widely believed that India was St. Thomas' sphere of work. As Cardinal Tisserant says there was a very ancient evangelization started by St. Thomas, the Apostle and mainly in South India<sup>1</sup>.

At the dawn of Christian era there were trade routes connecting West Asia and the East. The land routes reached parts of North India, while the Sea routes reached the coast of Kerala and other parts of

E. Tisserant, <u>Eastern Christianity in India</u> (London: Orient Longman, 1957) 10.

South India. Then, one can accept the possibility of the Apostle finding an easy passage to India. Jewish settlements and trade connections with Malabar was an added attraction to the Apostle for his missionary journey<sup>2</sup>. Modern scholarship has advanced evidences and testimonies to prove the historicity of St. Thomas apostolate in Malabar<sup>3</sup>.

# 3.2 The Syrian tradition

Also the tradition of Christians of Malabar is rich in stories regarding relation between the Christians in India and Church of Persia. The NEB reports:

"The origin of Christians of St.Thomas are uncertain, though they seem to have been in existence before the 6th century AD and probably derive from the missionary activity of East Syrian (Nestorian) church...Despite their geographic isolation, they retained the Chaldean liturgy and Syriac language and maintained fraternal ties with the Babylonian (Bagdad) Patriarch: their devotional practices also included Hindu religious symbolism vestiges of Syrian Christians to their early religion".

A.M. Mundadan, <u>History of Christianity in India Vol.1</u> (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1982) 21.

Tisserant, op.cit: 10.

The New Encyclopedia Britannica (NEB) Vol. 3 15th edition (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 1997) 281.

An important aspect to note about the early Christian community according to Brown is: "There is no evidence at all that the Christians were considered a foreign community. They were a recognized part of Malabar society and that society had coloured their understanding of Christianity"<sup>5</sup>.

The original community of St. Thomas Christians had undergone, in course of time, a decline. It was reconstituted and reinvigorated by groups of Christians who came from Persia. This contact was an important event in the history of St. Thomas Christians in the middle of the 4th century. According to Julius Richter:

"In the year 345 AD there landed in Malabar according to the tradition of Thomas Christians of south India, under the convoy of a Jerusalem merchant Thomas, a bishop from Edessa, accompanied by Presbyters and deacons, and by a company of men and women youths and maidens from Jerusalem, Bagdad and Nineveh.... They were welcomed with great rejoicing by the Christians of the country, and endowed with important privileges by the ruler of the land so that their arrival was the beginning of a flourishing epoch in the history of Malabar Church" 6.

L.W. Brown, <u>The Indian Christians of St.Thomas</u> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956) 16.

Julius Richter, <u>A History of Missions in India</u> (Edinburgh: Oliphant Anderson & Ferrier, 1908) 30.

The king of Malabar gave St. Thomas Christians as much land they wanted, conferred upon them royal honours and inscribed the grant and honours on copper plates. The Christians distinguished themselves as merchants, who concentrated in their own hands a large part of commerce of the Malabar coast (Kerala). Most important of all, they were assigned comparatively high rank in the hide-bound caste system of the south coast region, superior to that of the Waniers and Kammalers, Vyisyas and as feudal lords to have been placed on level with the aristocracy of the country.

#### 3.3 Socio-cultural life of St. Thomas Christians

It is only fair that, man should always have the privilege of evolving and enjoying his socio-cultural milieu. One cannot imagine a life, which totally ignores the socio-cultural environment. The success of a life, more so of a spiritual life depends very much on the ability of a person or community to adapt itself to the milieu in which one lives. This is true also of Christian community. Its qualitative and quantitative growth and dynamism depended on its adaptability to the social and cultural set up of the period.

In the early centuries of Christian era and even before, Malabar was a 'museum of race and cultures'. The early inhabitants were predominantly Dravidians with their own religious practices. The Brahmins were believed to have migrated to Malabar around 300-400

B.C and they are known as Nambudiris<sup>7</sup>. The Nairs next in the social scale were the ruling class and military men of Malabar. All others were considered to be low castes. The main religions were Hinduism and Buddhism<sup>8</sup>. In the beginning of the Christian era while forming their own religious and social customs Thomas Christians owed a great deal to Hinduism. Adapting themselves to the caste-ridden Hindu social set up and mingling with many aspects of the ancient Hindu culture they became the sons of the soils in the fullest sense. This was what might naturally follow as most of the early converts were from high caste Brahmins<sup>9</sup>. Thus the legacy, which the Thomas Christians received from Hinduism, had not only given them a high social standing but also helped to shape spiritual life and attitude adapting itself to the environment. On St. Thomas Christian's success in adapting themselves to the cultural milieu of Malabar Brown comments:

"Syrian Christian community, foreign in origin, put down such deep roots in Indian soil that it became accepted without question as indigenous a position hardly yet attained by Christian Churches which are the fruit of European Christian missionary movement of the nineteenth century".

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<sup>10</sup> L.W. Brown, op. cit.: 167.

K.M. Panikkar, <u>A History of Kerala</u> (Annamalai Nagar: Annamalai University, 1959) 2-3.

K.P.P. Menon, <u>History of Kerala written in the form of Notes</u>, Vol.1 (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1982) 73-76.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> K.P.P. Menon, <u>History of Kerala, Vol. 2</u> (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1983) 445. The early Christian were believed from four Brahmin families called Pakalomattam, Sankarapuri, Kalli and Kaliankal.

The works of the L.W. Brown, A.M. Mundadan, and Placid J. Podippara have an elaborate description of social life of St.Thomas Christians in its first sixteen centuries of existence. As mentioned already the majority of people converted by the Apostle were Brahmins and other high caste people. It is no wonder therefore, that in the overall social set up of Malabar, the Christians differed very little from higher castes. Their day-to-day lives resembled very closely that of the Brahmins.

They followed many customs practiced among Hindus. Newborn child is fed with a paste of honey and powdered gold. This custom followed by Brahmins was intended to ensure prosperity<sup>11</sup>. The infant was given name from the Old Testament or New Testament. But a child gets also a call name or pet name which is quite indigenous and very often a Hindu name. The Synod of Diamper forbade this practice believing that such a name was given as a baptismal name<sup>12</sup>. At the age of four the child is initiated into the letters of alphabet by a teacher (Asan or guru) probably a Hindu. After this initiation the child is sent to the local school for further instruction. Thomas Christians also followed these practices since that was the educational system of Kerala at that time. Placid J. Podippara says, generally the gurus were Hindus but they taught the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> L.W.Brown, op. cit.: 185.

Scaria Zacharia, ed. <u>The Acts and Decrees of the Synod of Diamper</u> (Edamattom: Indian Institute of Christian Studies, 1994) 120. Synod of Diamper (1599) is the synodal council at Oodiamperoor, or Diamper where the Roman Catholic rites were forcefully imposed upon the St.Thomas Christians. The decrees were violently enforced by Menezes the Arch Bishop of Goa with the help of Portuguese authorities.

Thomas Christian children even the Christian prayers and catechism<sup>13</sup>. The Synod of Diamper forbade the parents to send their children to heathen masters who were idolaters, because the masters demand from the children 'reverence' to their Pagodas (temple)<sup>14</sup>. The Christians shared many other things besides name with the Nayars. They occasionally took wives from that community and their children often went to school with Nayar children. They joined in many of the ordinary celebrations of country such as Onam and Vishu or New Year's Day<sup>15</sup>. Many Christian families have had certain privileges in the temple, which are believed to have been granted in recognition of some service given, or some present made in former times. And some Christians give gifts to temple.

Communication of faith is an expression and an outflow of one's deep faith and spirituality. It is believed that each Christian community has the responsibility of communication of its faith because of Christ's command to spread the gospel to the nations. Ever since the dawn of Christianity 'faith-communication' is being increasingly carried out by the local Churches and individuals. It is generally believed that the Church of the Christians of St.Thomas had not done much in this direction before the arrival of the Europeans. Stephen Neill in this regard opined that: "There is no clear evidence of attempts by Indian

Placid J. Podippara, <u>The Thomas Christians</u> (London: Longman and Todd, 1970) 81

Scaria Zacharia, op.cit.: 96-97. The nature of this 'reverence' is not known, as the Synod does not describe it.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> L.W.Brown op cit.: 171.

Christian community to propagate its faith in the non-Christian society in the midst of which it had its existence" <sup>16</sup>.

The question why the St. Thomas Christians of India did not propagate their faith had generated many explanations. Some argue that it was the result of the honorable place given by the Rajas to the Christians and of their assimilation of the social customs of their Hindu neighbors. Propagation of one's faith was not common in Hinduism and therefore St. Thomas Christians were averse to proselytizing. The caste feeling no doubt stood in the way of receiving into their community people of low caste.

Though Thomas Christians were ranked among high-caste people, being a minority they could not in any way influence the structure of Hindu society. And many attempts at breaking the caste system meant disruption of society. Thus the policy of non-conversion of the lower castes seems to have been accepted by the St. Thomas Christians. This changed after the arrival of the Portuguese.

The unique feature of the life of the St. Thomas Christians was that while they upheld their Christian faith, they were culturally integrated with mainstream Hindu community. The Synod of Diamper forbade a number of Hindu customs and practices retained by St. Thomas Christians, which

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Stephen Neill, <u>A History of Christianity in India</u> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 47. Before the arrival of Portuguese there was communal harmony and cordial relation between Christians and Hindus. It was presumed that Christian population increase not by proselytizing but by power of their life style.

the Portuguese considered unchristian, pagan, and heathen errors. These prohibitions and restrictions imposed by the Synod were detrimental to communal harmony and the cordial relations that existed between Christians and Hindus. The concern for communal harmony and the spirit of tolerance should be considered a typical Indian contribution to Christian Vision. The Synod of Diamper mentioned among others one particular error the St. Thomas Christians are said to have held the belief that, each one can be saved in his own law (religion), all laws (religions) are right<sup>17</sup>. This reflects the Indian view of universal salvation.

As is clear from the above, the St.Thomas Christians adapted themselves well to the culture of the place. Living for centuries in a positive encounter with Hindu community they developed a theological vision, which was inclusive, pluralistic and liberal. Compared to the modern missions' approach to non-Christian religions one must admit that the vision of St.Thomas Christians was truly an enlightened one. At the time of the arrival of Portuguese at sixteenth century the Christians of Kerala were living a life of a privileged position in society, preserving the ancient culture of India vitalizing it with Christian principles. Scholars rightly described the identity of Thomas Christians as: "Hindu in culture, Christian in Religion and oriental in worship". C.V. Cheriyan observes; "it is evident that their life was strikingly similar to that of their Hindu brethren. Their customs and manners, life

A.M.Mundadan, <u>Indian Christians Search for Identity and Struggle for Autonomy</u> op.cit.: 27.

Placid J. Podippara, op. cit.: 27.

and culture conformed to the general pattern in the land where they lived. Hence, Christianity in Kerala developed as an essentially Indian religion while the votaries of that religion zealously guarded the fundamentals of their faith as the most treasured of their possession"<sup>19</sup>.

#### 3.4 The Portuguese intrusion

The second half of the fifteenth century is famous in the history of the world as the time of the great voyages of discovery undertaken by maritime nations of Western Europe, which led to the founding of colonial empires in America, Africa and Asia. The pioneers in this enterprise were Spain and Portugal. One of the motives behind it was the desire to find out a new route to India for the purpose of trade. The famous traveller Marco Polo who travelled in the East from 1270 to 1295 was the first to bring a moderately trustworthy account of India, its people, its wealth in the ears of Europe. In 1498 Vasco de Gama reached India and landed near Calicut in search of 'Christians and spices'. For the Christians of Malabar it was the beginning of a new epoch of tremendous importance, entering into a new world of existence. As Julius Richter says; the landing of the Portuguese marks the advent of a new epoch, an epoch of Roman Catholic Mission in India<sup>20</sup>.

C.V. Cheriyan, <u>A History of Christianity in Kerala</u> (Kottayam: Kerala Historical Society, 1973) 153.

Julius Richter, op.cit: 44.

The Portuguese Kings also viewed it as their sacred duty to render all support to spread the gospel. Panikkar says:

"With the Portuguese Christianisation was a state enterprise. The king paid for the entire ecclesiastical establishment of the East. The doctrine of Padroado (*jus patronatus* established by the Papal Bull of 1514) vested the authority for missionary work effectively in the hands of the Portuguese crown in areas where Portugal claimed political rights"<sup>21</sup>.

### 3.5 Portuguese-St. Thomas Christian interface

The Portuguese considered the Indian Christians' life inferior in many ways. Their attitude to Indian Christians or St. Thomas Christians was motivated by a sense of superiority about their form of Christianity, which according to them was the true form to which all Christians should conform in order to be perfect Christians. Their aim always was to make the Indian Christians conform to the Portuguese ways and usages, which were of Latin derivation. On the other hand, St. Thomas Christians held a different view. They could never imagine that only the Latin form of Christianity was the true form of Christianity. According to them:

"... both the Portuguese and they were Christians and both belong to the universal church. But each local community has

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K.M. Panikkar <u>Asia and Western Dominance</u> (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1974) 280.

their customs and usages probably going back to the time of the Apostles themselves. They could never entertain the idea of giving up their customs and practices. They were ready to accept from the Latin missionaries what they lack in instruction, a better discipline, but not those missionaries"<sup>22</sup>.

The general impression in the west about the eastern Christians was that they were heretics and schismatic. The conflict began when the Portuguese tried to bring St. Thomas Christians under their ecclesiastical jurisdiction<sup>23</sup>. There were some fundamental differences between the Portuguese and the St. Thomas Christians. Though both were motivated by the same principle of Christian unity, the Indian Christians were conscious of their communal identity, local culture and naturally there were reservations in their social relations with the Portuguese. On the Portuguese side there were no restrictions or reservations. The St. Thomas Christians were not ready for a compromise on their communal life, which was culturally governed by local customs. Though Christians, they did not like to mingle with Portuguese freely because they were alien to Indian culture. In this sense the high caste people of Malabar were less strangers to them than the Portuguese<sup>24</sup>. Also the Indian Christians are said to have held the view that each one can be saved through one's own

24 Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> H.C.Perumalil & E.R.Hambye, op.cit.: 86.

Xavier Koodapuzha, <u>Faith and Communion of the Indian Church of the Saint Thomas</u> (Vadavathur: Institute of Religious Studies, 1982) 144.

faith and all faiths are, in that sense, right. Portuguese considered this a serious 'error', bordering on heresy.

In its relation with the Portuguese Christians the St. Thomas Christians wanted their community to remain unimpaired in any way, each independent of the other but with full cooperation for the benefit of both. But the Portuguese naturally tried to persuade the local Christians to accept the Pope as their patriarch, which they were not easily prepared to do though at the same time they did not want to alienate the goodwill of the Portuguese and endanger their pepper trade<sup>25</sup>. Portuguese missions were against any sort of indianisation or integration of Christianity with Indian culture. They did not practise religious tolerance. Many of their moves were meant to destroy the customs of the indigenised Christians and to Europeanize them. The Portuguese and the missionaries indulged in proselytization but asked the new converts to give up their caste and as a sign of it they asked them to eat beef and drink wine, so abominable to the Indian high castes. (Eating beef and drinking liquor were the customs of the lowest castes and the outcastes in India). Thus they made Christianity a hated and untenable religion for the higher castes. Firth says:

"In the eyes of the Hindus Christianity was the religion of the 'franks or parangis' the term used to denote especially the Portuguese but also any kind of European. It was not a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> C.P. Mathew & M.M.Thomas, <u>The Indian Churches of Saint Thomas</u> (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1967) 27.

complimentary term, it suggested meat-eating, wine-drinking, loose- living, arrogate persons, whose manners were so far removed from Indian propriety that social intercourse with them was unthinkable"<sup>26</sup>.

Thus the Portuguese-St. Thomas Christian encounter became a turning point in the history of the Christians of the Malabar Coast.

#### 3.6 St. Francis Xavier and Jesuit mission

By the year 1540 the Portuguese had established themselves firmly on the west coast with their main mission centre at Goa and stations at Cranganore(Kodungallur) and Cochin. The Indian Christians continued as before and their relations with the Portuguese were still friendly. Under Portuguese influence there had been many conversions to Christianity resulting in the creation of an Indo-Portuguese Christian community though of rather unsatisfactory quality. It was at this stage that the King of Portugal, always solicitous for the progress of Christian faith in his rapidly expanding dominions, appealed to the Pope and the newly formed Society of Jesus for missionaries to go to India. The first man to be chosen was Francis Xavier (1506-1552). Francis Xavier was educated in Paris where he had come under the influence of Ignatius Loyola. In 1541 he set out for India with the object of reclaiming for Christ the 'heathen' population

C.B. Firth, op.cit.: 111.

of the areas under Portuguese influence<sup>27</sup>, or in other words 'conquer the East for Christianity'. Thus began the Jesuit mission in India, which really changed the cartography of Christianity in Asia.

Francis Xavier is justifiably called the pioneer of missions in Asia, of which India had a share. He towers above all those who followed him by his sympathy for the poor and the lowly, by his energy and spirit, by his utter fearlessness in the face of dangers and his supreme faith in his mission. His consuming desire was to spread the message of Christ far and wide. He was dogmatic and intolerant, but it was the outcome of his blind faith. By starting various schools at important places, Xavier contributed also to the spread of education in India. The fact that he showed special concern for the sick and the poor, particularly the fisher folk, increased his popularity. His spirit has been an inspiration for generations of Christian workers in India. However, his main drawback, as it must be admitted, was that he knew very little about the genius and wealth of the Indian culture and religions. Actually his contacts with India were only through the coastal regions of the south-west and south-east and with the less or least educated people. Firth is right when he wrote: "He had been criticized for hasty and superficial methods never stopping to learn a language or really get to know the culture of a people"<sup>28</sup>.

K.M. Panikkar, <u>India Through Ages</u> (New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House, 1988) 225-226.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> C.B. Firth, op.cit.: 67.

#### 3.7 Robert De Nobili and the Madurai mission

The Jesuit mission that St. Francis Xavier established in India took up with enthusiasm the work of conversion. But progress was slow till Robert de Nobili a brilliantly gifted, highly educated, and zealous man came to be in charge of the mission in Madurai in Tamil Nadu. De Nobili a man of remarkable insight who came with desire to convert as many Hindus as possible to Christianity, after a short experience of life in Madurai, reached the conclusion that Christianity would have little success in India if it kept to its western grab and refused to understand the mind and thought of the people of the country. The problem before him was to make Christianity acceptable to Hindus without being imposed on them. He received the answer from St. Paul who said that while preaching one has to get naturalised in the culture of the community for whom the message is meant\*. De Nobili obtained the approval of the Jesuit mission to undertake a serious study of Hinduism and Madurai was specially suited for this purpose. Closely following the social habits of Brahmins, Nobili was able to obtain assistance from learned pundits in his study of Hindu religious thought. He hoped to win people of the higher castes by leaving the whole caste system untouched. After years of arduous work, in the course of which he acquired a fair mastery of Sanskrit, he met in argument the learned Brahmins of Madurai, in religious discussion. These were according to the ancient

\* In 1 Corin.Chapt. 9: 20 St. Paul says that: To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law-though not been myself under the law, that I might win those under the law.

well-established practice of sastrathavada, debates on religious topics before a learned audience. There he tried to uphold Christian doctrines in terms of *Upanishadice* thought. He is said to have gained the respect of even the orthodox Brahmins of the court. But, as Richter says, Nobili's system stood in sharp contrast to that of Xavier, which had prevailed hitherto, to the ordinary rule and practice of every monastic order in India<sup>29</sup>.

But the other mission groups could not appreciate Nobili's attempt to present Christianity in a Hindu grab. Rome forced Nobili to abandon his methods and forbade him to baptize. He was accused of corrupting Christianity by admitting Hindu practices into it. Intolerance of things Indian became henceforth the characteristic feature of missionary zeal in India. Any compromise with Hindu life or religion was forbidden for example, the eating of beef was held to be necessary as it would put the convert altogether out of the pale of Hinduism<sup>30</sup>.

### 3.8 The Mogul mission

To acquaint himself better with Christianity Emperor Akbar invited scholarly Christian missionaries to his court. They were well received and they held several discussions with the Emperor. From those discussions it became apparent that Akbar was bent on developing and propagating his own religion, Din Illahi that would

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Julius Richter, op.cit.: 63.

K. M. Panikkar, Asia and Western Dominance op.cit.: 281.

combine according to his opinion the best elements of all different religions. The Jesuits did not wish to have any part in it and showed the same spirit of intolerance. Panikkar, infact sums up the attitude of Jesuit missionaries when he wrote: "Their intolerance of other religions and their arrogant attitude towards the exponents of other faiths were unwelcome also to the Emperor. So the missionaries had to leave the capital greatly disappointed"<sup>31</sup>.

# 3.9 Portuguese missions: An assessment

From the very beginning Christianity had grown up in Indian soil as a naturalised religion and was accepted as one among the Indian religions. The Christians were respected and honoured by the rulers, leaders, and higher castes. The Rajas and the Emperors conferred up on them royal privileges and grants to be enjoyed forever. In martial, commercial and cultural achievements the Christians also made their contribution. Most of the foreign missionaries of sixteenth and seventeenth centuries particularly the Portuguese who imposed latinization on the Indian Christians, were to a large extent ignorant or ill informed of the social life and customs of India, and consequently failed to appreciate them. Indian Christians looked for an alternative structure to the Roman Catholic one, which had been imposed on them at the Synod of Diamper. The Coonen Cross Revolt in 1653 at Mattanchery near Kochi marked the final out break and split the

K.M. Panikkar, Asia and Western Dominance op.cit.: 281.

Christian community into two groups<sup>32</sup>. One remained in communion with the Pope and the other took an oath known as Coonen Cross Oath and decided to severe all communion with the Rome and keep its identity and autonomy.

The Christian missions did not make much inroads into the world of the caste Hindus or Muslims in the sixteenth century. There was hardly any creative encounter between Christianity and Indian culture. The missionary efforts of the Portuguese were mainly confined to small pockets in India where they held political power. Christianity spread mainly among the employees of the Portuguese and the depressed classes. Consequently caste Hindus developed the notion that Christianity was the religion of the depressed classes. Disappointingly the converts' understanding of Christian faith was shallow, their moral and ethical character frivolous and their life-style uninspiring that they provided no impetus for the surrounding non-Christians to rethink their way of life. Christianity and their missions were interpreted as means for the extension of western political control and aggressive imperialism. Many right thinking Indians had expressed their amazement at this dubious association. The words of Jawaharlal Nehru are illustrative: "The gospel of Jesus, the gentle but relentless

Paulos Mar Gregorious, <u>The Indian Orthodox Church–An Overview</u> (Kottayam: Sophia Publications, 1982) 53.

rebel against untruth and injustice, could so easily be made a tool of imperialism, capitalism and political domination"<sup>33</sup>.

Although Portuguese missionaries had been pioneers of missionary work and services during sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, their mission was aggressive and not in the way mission was envisaged by Jesus Christ. Their interest in missionary and ecclesiastical progress began to die down the moment the temporal power of the Portuguese began to decay. The Dutch and the British who came after the Portuguese were interested solely in trade. Moreover they were Protestants and had no sympathy with the activities of the catholic orders. So the first phase of evangelization came to a close in India by the middle of the seventeenth century with the decline of the political power of the Portuguese in the subcontinent.

#### 3.10 The Protestant missions

It is true to that the Protestant missions in the nineteenth century like the Roman Catholic mission in the sixteenth century largely followed the colonial flag. Colonialism and Christian mission went hand-in-hand since the arrival of the Portuguese in India. The extent and the nature of the relationship between the missions and colonialism varied from one colonial power to another. Nevertheless, there was an alliance and for many in India during this period Christianity was a western religion and a means used by the western

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Dick Kooiman, op.cit.: 26.

powers to establish their political control. And missionary enterprise was interwoven with commerce and cultural imperialism. The attitude and feelings of the educated Indians towards Christian missions are reflected in the following statement of the great social reformer Raja Ram Mohun Roy:

"In Bengal, where the English are rulers, and where the mere name of English man is sufficient to frighten people, an encroachment upon the rights of her poor, timid and humble inhabitants and upon their religion, can not be viewed in the eyes of God or the public as a justifiable act"<sup>34</sup>.

Chakkaria a Tamil Christian convert and a prominent lawyer was voicing the attitude of Hindus when he asked; why should the Hindus who yielded in politics and commerce allow the sanctity of their souls to be violated by the intrusion of a foreign religious denomination<sup>35</sup>?

Most of the missionaries and some historians of eighteenth and nineteenth century missions believed that British rule in India was an opportunity provided by God to lift India from ignorance about God and superstitions. In European mission histories, the colonized were termed as 'barbarous', 'savages', 'pagan' and 'superstitious'. Hence

Quoted in Jacob S. Dharmaraj, <u>Colonialism and Christian Mission: Post Colonial Reflections</u> (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1993) 13.

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T.V. Philip, "Christianity in India during Western Colonisation: Conflict, Reconciliation or Adjustment", <u>ICHR</u> Vol.XXI, No. 1 June (1987): 16.

the mission goal was not only Christianising heathens, but also civilizing them under superior European culture and evangelical spirituality. Further the missionary work in eighteenth-nineteenth century India was grounded in the binary distinctions of European and Indian, white and brown, civilized and primitive and Christian and pagan. This binary division gave the colonizers grounds for justifying the European project of colonization of India and proselytizing of the Indians. William Wilberforce, leader of Evangelical group in the House of Commons said in 1793 that the Indian natives were idolatrous and superstitious with a "feeble knowledge of God". The people themselves were barbarous and low measured in the scale of European civilization. The natives must be taught a better religion at a time and in a manner that will not inspire them with passion for political change<sup>36</sup>. Hence the British, the patrons of the Christianising scheme, had a simple goal of raising the people to a higher and superior culture. It was the hope of the colonizers that if the higher classes in the Hindu social order were converted it would eventually lead to the dissolution of Hindu culture.

#### 3.10.1 The first Protestant mission

The first Protestant mission to India came from Denmark. King Frederick IV was an ardent follower of the Lutheran teachings. He believed that it is one of the duties devolving upon monarchs to make provision for Christianising their non-Christian subjects. A mission

Arthur Mayhew, <u>Christianity and the Government of India</u> (Delhi: Gian Publishing House, 1988) 27.

was founded in the Danish settlement of Tranquebar in South India. The first Protestant missionaries to arrive on Indian soil were two German missionaries Ziegenbalg and Plutschau sent by the King. They landed on July 9<sup>th</sup> 1706 in Tranquebar a Danish trade post. Julius Richter says that this marked the birthday of Protestant missions in India<sup>37</sup>. Since the Danish trade post never crossed boundary of Tamil kingdom, their missionary work was confined mainly to Tamil Nadu region. The Protestant missionary work gained momentum only after the arrival and the expansion of Anglican power.

### 3.10.2 The British period

The British Government had three roles in India, first that of a trader, second that of ruler and then that of a Christian propagandist. British rulers held and professed Christianity. Consequently British rule was equated with Christian domination. In the early years of its rule the Company had taken a position of neutrality with regard to the religious and social affairs of its subject. The East India Company decided not to interfere with the traditional cultures of the people by supporting missionary work. The company's policy was non-interference in Indian education but favouring traditional Hindu or oriental learning. The non-interference probably based was on the fear that missionaries through English education expecting to aid conversions might offend the Hindu

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Julius Richter, op. cit.: 103.

subjects of the company and create unrest<sup>38</sup>. This policy of non-interference with the customs and traditions of the natives and lack of support for missionary work were reviewed after the Company Charter was reviewed in 1813. Finally in 1833, the policy of the company was changed under pressure from the Evangelicals in England. This marked the first decisive step of missionary work in India. A spokesman of the Evangelicals declared: "The true cure of darkness is the introduction of light. The Hindus err because they were ignorant and their errors have never fairly been laid before them. The communication of our light and knowledge to them would prove the best remedy for their disorders"<sup>39</sup>.

The Charter of 1833 approved the permanent presence of missionaries in India and made provision for Anglican hierarchy at Calcutta. With the expansion of the British Empire missionaries began to arrive and Christianity began to spread by establishing dioceses at Madras and Bombay. Ever since there existed a renewed cooperation between the missionaries and the colonial power in helping one another in their missions<sup>40</sup>.

By the end of the eighteenth century a new wave of the spirit of evangelization permeated Protestant Churches. In 1792 the English Baptists organised the first Anglican mission Baptist Missionary Society.

S. Immanuel David, "Save the Heathens from themselves" The Evolution of the educational policy of the East India Company till 1854, <u>ICHR</u> Vol. XVIII, No. 1 June (1984): 19-29.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Jacob S. Dharmaraj, op. cit.: 19.

Later Protestant missionary operations were undertaken on a large scale by LMS and CMS. Alongside the older societies there have come into the field a bewildering number of missionary organisations. The characteristic feature of nineteenth century missions was the enthusiasm for the multiplication of missionary efforts. The priority of the colonial missions was conversion. Conversion of individual souls was considered the sole end of mission. To a European missionary non-Christian religions and Eastern cultures were non-slavific and that Christianity alone would redeem them. The British rule had provided favourable atmosphere and necessary infrastructure for the missions to work even in the remotest mountain villages without confronting much opposition. Julius Richter says that, it would be hard to find any land possessing so great an attraction for the missionary societies <sup>41</sup>. The mood of mission societies and missionaries were summarized in the following words:

"The content of their (missionaries) hope was not merely a conglomerate of individual conversions but a comprehensive revolution in heathen Society in which every aspect of that society would be praised from the grip of satanic domination and submitted to the liberating lordship of Christ".

After the Charter of 1833 was renewed, missionaries were allowed freely to come to India. Missionary teams became powerful

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Julius Richter, op. cit.: 221.

Jacob S. Dharmaraj, op. cit.: 58.

and their style of work changed. By this time a new set of missionaries rooted in 'the iconoclastic zeal of extreme Protestantism' began to arrive. These missionaries, soon through letters, reports and stories, created a very distorted image about the people and culture in India. They were imbued with the western 'imperial sentiments' and the sense of cultural superiority and agreed with Charles Grant, the spokesman of the Evangelicals in England, that it was not any inborn weakness that made Hindu degenerate but the nature of their religion. For the evangelicals India was in darkness and would need the light present in the western world. Claudius Buchanan another spokesman of the evangelicals who had been a missionary in India said:

"The missionaries asserted that since God laid upon Britain the solemn duty of evangelizing India, the Government should not hesitate to throw its weight into the struggle. They demanded above all open Government patronage of Christian education and vigorous warfare upon the abuses associated with Hindu religion".

The Evangelicals and other mission societies made a combined attempt to change the policy of the British Government and demanded the introduction of legal and social reforms in India. It was thus that William Bentick in March 1835 issued his resolution intended mainly

<sup>43</sup> C.P. Mathew and M.M.Thomas, op.cit.: 48.

T.C.Joseph, "The Myth of the Colonial Connection", <u>The Sunday Statesman</u> September 20, 1987: 4.

to promote European literature and science and utilize funds mainly for English education<sup>45</sup>. The study of Indian literature and oriental works was admitted to be of little intrinsic value and the opinion was that these literatures inculcate the most serious errors on the subjects. Also the customs and traditions and the religious beliefs of the subject people were considered by the missionary educators and their societies in England as a sign of depravity and futility. The remedy was the introduction of English education<sup>46</sup>.

Alexander Duff, Scottish missionary and leading educator whose ideas can be considered representative of the majority of missionaries in the nineteenth century, thought that though Hindu philosophical discourse contained lofty terms in its religious vocabulary what they conveyed were only vain, foolish and wicked conceptions. According to Duff, Hinduism spread like a dark universe where all life dies and death lives<sup>47</sup>. The Christian task for him was to do everything possible to demolish such a gigantic fabric of idolatry and superstition. Needless to say, such an attitude prevented any positive encounter between Christianity and Indian culture. Duff, Buchanan, Trevelyan, Macaulay and others had great influence on the missionary thinking. The missionaries and civil servants who came to India were so prejudiced that they did not see anything good in India society.

<sup>45</sup> S.Immanuel David, op.cit.: 27.

Stephen Neill, <u>Builders of the Indian Church</u> (Kottayam: CMS press, 1940) 106-123.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> T.V.Philip, op.cit. : 20.

The missionaries and their societies subscribed to the view that civilizing the Indian people would prepare the primitive religious people to embrace Christianity. Nineteenth century Protestant missiology could be understood against the background of Christianisation and civilizing as two sides of the same coin. Missions were unwilling to understand the complexities of Indian cultural variants. Deeply entrenched in them was a sense of superiority of European civilization and that coloured their approach to people of other cultures and religious faiths<sup>48</sup>. The missions and colonial administrators asserted that Hinduism would die away soon and the whole nation could be civilized and Christianised. English education was a means towards this goal. That is to facilitate change from exterior to interior, from trade to religion, a cultural revolution for the betterment of the natives by disseminating knowledge of Christianity and make them loyal to the British<sup>49</sup>. The comment of Arthur Mayhew is worth mentioning: "The evangelical supporters of Anglican mission were far more interested in the dissemination of the Bible and baptismal statistics than in any measure for the general enlightenment of India"<sup>50</sup>. The primary interest of the Raj was to keep control over India. The dominant interest of missions was to work for the conversion of Indians to Christianity. But in the colonial situation they found themselves in need of one another and so mutual support was but natural.

Poikail John George, "Racist Assumptions of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Missionary Movement", <u>IRM</u> Vol.LIX, No.235 July (1970): 271-283.

Jacob S. Dharmaraj, "A Brief Review of Alexander Duff, English Education and Colonial Connections in 19<sup>th</sup> Century India", <u>ICHR</u> Vol.XXV, No.2 December (1991): 82-83.

Arthur Mayhew, op. cit.: 163.

Although the missionaries worked hard and suffered a lot for bringing education and awareness of social justice to the people living in the rural areas of India, as they were associated with the colonialimperial powers, the significance of their selfless service was either overlooked or misunderstood.

The response this approach evoked need to be looked into detail. The fourth chapter is an attempt to do this. If Indians really lived under the influence of the pagan religion and were uncivilised, they would have whole-heartedly welcomed the missionary enterprise. But they did not. The natives were not unresponsive to the civilising project. How they reacted needs to be examined in detail and the next chapter intends to do it in some detail.

# CHAPTER 4

# IMPACT OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS AN OVERVIEW

- 4.1 The Impact of missions, a summing up
- 4.2 Christian missions and English education

#### **CHAPTER FOUR**

#### IMPACT OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS-AN OVERVIEW

#### 4.1 The impact of missions, a summing up

In the preceding part an attempt was made to understand the Christian missions in India in terms of western missionary expansion. As stated earlier, India had a hoary tradition of tolerance and assimilation. This tradition was the creation of the syncretic Hindu mind eager to be in touch with all other thought currents. "Let noble thoughts come to us from all sides" was the prayer of the Hindu sages. The early converts to Christianity lived cordially in the midst of Hindus respecting one another. This facilitated the growth of Christianity in the Indian soil perfectly as an Indian religion.

The course of cordiality did not run smooth. The first shock to the cordial relation between Christian community and non-Christians was received from the famous Synod of Diamper. Latin rites and ordinances were imposed forcefully and a new world of Christendom was threatened to be extended without caring to understand the social peculiarities of the place where it was expected to grow and prosper and ignoring the religio-cultural sensitivity of the people amidst whom the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Rigveda 1-89-1.

new religion was to exist. As pointed out earlier the central thrust of the activities of the Jesuit missions established in India during the second half of sixteenth century was proselytizing the native population to Christianity. In Goa mission became an instrument for conditioning the native people to accept to Portuguese rule and to assimilate their culture. Christianity was identified with changing over to Portuguese names and dress, beef eating, wine drinking and loose living. All this created repugnance in the minds of the natives. That missionary enterprises almost everywhere served the colonial political power was a characteristic feature of that time. It has to be noted that, the progress of Jesuit mission activities began to decline when the temporal power of the Portuguese began to decay.

In the second place, the missions brought with them an attitude of moral superiority of the Christians and a claim in their own exclusive righteousness. The doctrine of the monopoly of truth and revelation as claimed by the missionaries were alien to Hindu mind. It was an article of faith with the Hindus that though God / Truth was one and indivisible, there were different ways to It. The sages had said: - 'Ekam sat vipra bahuta vadanti' - that which is- TRUTH - is one; but the wise speak of it variously the reasonable. The claim of Christian sects that they alone possess the truth and others are condemned seemed unreasonable. Third is the association of Christian missionary work with aggressive imperialism. Colonial culture and its ideologies were imposed upon India by a dominant class of evangelicals and bureaucrats from England. There was no serious effort from the side of

the missionaries or mission societies to understand oriental institutions, learn natives literature or sympathetically deal with the religious and cultural sentiments of Indian people. Missions believed that introduction of western science and Christianity alone would redeem the people of India from their cultural predicament. The missions believed that India was consigned to the lowest rung of the ladder of civilization because of its barbarous and superstitious religion. National sentiments looked upon this type of missionary attitude and activity as inimical to the country's interests. The educational activities of the missionaries stressing the glories of European culture only led to the identification of the work of mission with western cultural aggression. All these naturally led the native people to look upon the entire missionary project with suspicion and the missionaries were considered the nation's enemies.

Fourthly, the missionaries who preached against caste were themselves perpetrators of the cultural superiority of the west, perpetrating the caste sin in a different way. Local missionaries and converts were not treated on equal terms with foreign missionaries. Though it was taught that in Christ all people are utterly equal the European Christians were more equal, to use an Orwellian expression. There were even instances of English missionaries vehemently opposing efforts by Indian Christian leaders to form indigenous missions. This showed that even missionaries were not free from racism.

It is indisputable that in order to interpret the (revealed) message of any religion properly the living situation of the people has to be understood thoroughly. Cultures, languages and traditions must be taken seriously. It could be seen that in this respect also the missions failed. In other words they failed to contextualise the gospel message. It appeared that the missionaries were concerned with ensuring that Indian people received the correct pattern of behaviour, right set of doctrines, and the true model of society, which were developed in Europe. It has been pointed out that the European missionaries failed to understand that authentic mission is true identification with the struggles of human beings for self-expression and self-emancipation, active participation in their struggle for freedom and total involvement towards liberation. Colonial mission failed even in conveying properly the Christian message of hope to the native peoples within context of their sufferings and struggles.

This is not to ignore the fact that there was something basically appealing about the sacrifices of certain missionaries and evangelicals and the efforts they took in bringing the Gospel meaningful and in providing education and knowledge to people in India. Their activities would have been commendable if missions acknowledged the richness of the religious pluralism, communal harmony and the magnificent hierarchy of human relationships prevalent in India. The refusal to accept native cultures deprived the chance of the Gospel being preached in its contextualising nature and of its dynamics of penetrating every human society.

British authorities helped missionaries financially. They helped in the construction of mission houses and Churches. The Christians were exempted from drawing procession cars-chariots-in Hindu festivals. Christians were appointed as civil judges and donations were provided for mission schools. All this created an impression that British rulers intended to Christianise India<sup>2</sup>. Many of the laws enacted in the princely state of Travancore were in favour of Christians. Converted Christians were exempted from all duties connected with the temples and they were permitted free use of public streets while for other low caste people use of public roads near temples were prohibited. In South Travancore missionaries with the help of the British got the low caste people exempted from performing uriyam or forced labour for temples on Sundays<sup>3</sup>.

The work of Christian missions among the depressed classes and tribals is worth examining. The stigma of untouchability that rested upon them for generations had led them to a sub-human level of existence. They were systematically exploited and kept down for centuries by caste Hindus. For many who got converted to Christianity it represented liberation from the dehumanising conditions of their existence. They were also benefited by the educational felicities provided by missions, the converts from the underprivileged groups made striking progress in their

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Hugald Grafe, <u>History of Christianity in India Vol. IV</u>, Part II (Bangalore: CHAI, 1990) 221.

Koji Kawashima, <u>Missionaries and a Hindu State</u> (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998) 55 -80.

social and cultural life. Bulk of the people converted in the nineteenth-and twentieth centuries were tribals. The Bhils and Gonds in Chotanagapur, the tribal of North East India are examples. Besides general education, missions gave technical education to tribal youth. In the field of health and hygiene also the missions rendered substantial service by providing medical aid to women and children. Since most of the new converts came from the economically and socially backward classes, several industrial and agricultural projects were established to improve their conditions. The Basel Mission on the west coast of south India became well known for its tile making and textile industries. Carpentry, furniture making and other crafts were taught to the poor Christians in south India. There was great emphasis on rural education and reconstruction programmes in the Protestant missions' social agenda. Some of the outstanding Christian schools and colleges of India are the result of the pioneering efforts of missionaries. The Christian educational work for girls served as a model for government and other agencies to found schools for girls' education. St. Stephen's College Delhi, Madras Christian College Madras, and St. John's College at Agra are only a few of the many institutions of higher education started by the missionaries. Pioneer work in the field of womens' education was done by Pandita Ramabhai a Christian convert. She worked indefatigably for the progress of women's education. Ramabhai founded an institution called *Mukt*i for helping widows and others<sup>4</sup>. Women's Christian College Madras,

P. Thomas, <u>Christians and Christianity in India and Pakistan</u> (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1954) 195-223.

Isabella Thoburn College Lucknow, Sarah Tucker College Palayamcottah etc. are notable in the field of women education. In addition to these there were schools for the deaf and the blind. The Christian educational work for girls provided an impetus to the government and other agencies to found schools for girls. The Arya Samaj, Theosophical society, Ramakrishna Mission and other agencies began to take interest in womens' education following the lead given by the Christian missions. The Christian colleges exerted great influence on Indian education and Indian thought. The terrible inadequacy of medical facilities in India induced Christian missions to start hospitals and dispensaries in cities and villages. Zenana Medical Mission (ZMM) was founded to bring medical aid to women and children in India. The missions' medical work also included establishing several Tuberculosis sanatoriums and leprosy asylums. Tuberculosis(TB) sanatoriums at Arogyavarum and Christian Medical Colleges at Velloore in Tamil Nadu and Ludhiana in Punjab are important medical institutions started by missions<sup>5</sup>.

The movements initiated by the educated Hindus to reform their religion may be listed as the most important positive impact of the work of Christian of missions. The flow of knowledge and education from the west did not brainwash the educated class so as to consider Christianity as a substitute for Hinduism. On the contrary, it helped them to examine and evaluate their own religion in a new light. The

Stephen Neill, <u>The Story of Christian Church in India and Pakistan</u> (Madras: CLS-ISPCK, 1972) 106-109.

western impact and the resultant awakening were pervasive and had its effect upon Indian politics, art and literature besides religion. The Hindus even used the gift of English education in opposing missionaries. Thus the rational criticism and historical analysis which the missionaries themselves employed to dislodge Hinduism were adopted by the Hindus to defend their religion and critique the doctrines of Christianity<sup>6</sup>. The entire nineteenth-century, especially the second half of it was a period of cultural and religious ferment in India under the influence of western culture and missions. Whether they meant it or not, Christian missions by familiarising the Indian mind with certain European concepts helped in reviving the dormant Indian spirit which in time created new schools of thought. The social activities of Christian missions were directed towards brining about moral reforms in Indian society and helped in the emancipation of individuals from their age old superstitions and other social evils like untouchability and caste discrimination. Missions demanded legal support from the British government in support of their vigorous fight against social evils and superstitious practices associated with Hindu religion such as widow burning or Sati, child marriage, drowning of children in sacred rivers etc. With the support of liberal Hindu leaders and missionaries Governor General William Bentick introduced several legal measures of social reforms <sup>7</sup>.

P. Chenchiah, "Christianity and Hinduism", <u>NCCI</u> Vol. XLVIII, No. 3 March (1928): 119-138.

K.T. Paul, <u>The British Connection With India</u> (London: SCM, 1927) 21-70.

Lastly during second half of nineteenth-century the educational endeavour of Christian missionaries played an important role in the social liberation of the lower castes particularly in the South and in the North Eastern parts of India. The missionaries strove to secure equal rights for them. Missionaries did much to free them from evils like bonded labour, unjust taxation etc. and also for the rights of the women to wear upper cloth. Here missions played the role of a socio-religious movement, which indirectly gave birth to neo-Hindu reformist movements. J. Waston Pickett has also surveyed the Christian mass movements in India and has spelled out the impact of missions in the social emancipation of the depressed classes <sup>8</sup>.

### 4.2 Christian missions and English education

Alexander Duff, Charles Trevelyn and Thomas Macaulay formed the triumvirs of English education in India. The evangelicals in England and missionaries in India were the prime movers behind the spreading of English education in India. With their ceaseless propaganda the evangelicals succeeded in bringing about some changes in the political climate in England, and missionaries effected a similar transformation in the administrative structure in India. The missionary educators in India trusted in the transforming power of western education and the universality of English literature. They were

J.W. Gladston in his case-study of the conversion movement among lower castes in Travancore has elaborated the details. Refer J. Waston Pickett, <u>Christian Mass Movement in India</u> (New York, Abingdon Press, 1933) 58-85, 265-312.

bent upon civilizing the people of India by Christianising and westernising them. Their assumption was that nineteenth-century Britain was the ideal paradigm of Christian culture and society. They presumed that God has laid upon Britain the solemn duty of civilizing and Christianising the whole pagan world i.e., the non-Christian world. Missions demanded above all open government patronage for Christian education and the war they declared upon the evils associated with Hindu religion. Governor-Generals like Lord Wellesley and Lord Bentick were in open alliance with Christian missions for introducing English education. They had the dream of destroying the pagan religious system of India and implanting evangelistic beliefs and European cultural practices<sup>9</sup>.

Both the missionaries and colonial administrators believed that the introduction of European knowledge and civilization was the remedy for all social evils in India. To Quote Arthur Mayhew: "large and continuous doses of western knowledge would not only purge (India) of Hindu and Islamic religion, but also build up a new India with an essentially Christian constitution" <sup>10</sup>.

After the introduction of English education in India the subcontinent experienced a proliferation of English medium schools and colleges, mostly run by missionaries. A conservative estimate would give a total of 180 English institutions and 30,000 students in attendance in 1854.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> P. Thomas, op. cit.: 188-189.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Arthur Mayhew, op.cit. : 165–166.

And six years after the opening of the universities, English historical and philosophical works penetrated every corner of British India. In Bombay, Calcutta and Madras Macaulay's scheme of English education was implemented, conditioning the converts culturally to accept the Christian spirit<sup>11</sup>. As the English education introduced in India lacked moral content, the missionary educators reasoned that mere introduction of western science into academic curriculum was not enough. Science in itself was value neutral, or amoral. It should include moral and ethical teachings, by which was meant Christian instruction<sup>12</sup>.

The great religious revival in the eighteenth century England had its influence on the cultural policy of the British in India. Under its influence, people like Duff attempted to civilize Indians during the period of Governor-General William Bentick. The British administrators imbued with utilitarian ideas and evangelicals under extreme form of pietism were instrumental in introducing the new cultural policy. They sought to civilize Indians by imposing western morality on them and to put them on the way to modernity by making them imitators of the western civilization. For Charles Grant an important member of the Court of Directors of East India Company, Hinduism was a degrading idolatry with all its rubble of impure deities, its monsters of wood and stone, its false principles and corrupt practices, its delusive hopes and

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Studdert-Kennedy Gerald, <u>British Christians</u>, <u>Indian Nationalists and the Raj</u> (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996) 116-119.

E.C. Dewick, "INDIA, The War and the Gospel", NCCR Vol. LXII, NO.10 October (1942): 399-405.

fears, its ridiculous ceremonies superstitions, its lying legends and fraudulent impositions <sup>13</sup>. William Wilberforce while speaking on Indian society and religion declared in the House of Common: Our religion is sublime, pure and beneficent. Theirs' is mean licentious and cruel <sup>14</sup>. John Stuart Mill a utilitarian for example, argued that, his views on Europe could not apply to India because Indian people were civilizationally inferior. In the final chapter he argued that Indian's civilization had 'not attained the requisite degree of development' and his views about Europe could not be applied to India <sup>15</sup>. The rulers and evangelicals, in fact, were only articulating the inmost feeling of the self-conscious Britons who in the nineteenth century possessed the inflated self-image of being the most highly civilized people on the earth. They advocated a totally western educational scheme for India and believed in the possibility of disintegration of Hinduism and Indian culture consequent on the widespread introduction of English education.

The spread of English education facilitated intellectual ferment, which produced a new class of Indian nationalists. These educated Indians who came out of the schools and universities, knew Christianity as the spiritual and cultural sources of western civilization and the liberal political institutions of the west. These nationalists had read writers and thinkers like John Stuart Mill, Charles Dickens, Voltaire, Rousseau and missionary educators such as Macaulay,

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Tara Chand, op. cit.: 238-239.

Quoted in Dharmaraj, <u>Colonialism and Christian Missions</u> op.cit.: 34.

Quoted in Dharmaraj, Colonialism and Christian Missions op.cit.: 34.

Alexander Duff, et. al. who idealized western culture and Christianity and poured contempt on Indian culture and religions. They were also watching the anglicising process that the British under the influence of the evangelicals and the utilitarians had thrust upon India. Further, in the streets of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, the new educated classes were hearing Christian missionaries from the west criticising Hinduism as the cause of the cultural, social, and political degeneration of India. The challenge of Christianity and western culture was felt by the Indian psyche. At the same time it was forced upon the nationalists that their identity would be sustained by reaffirming the tradition of India, a tradition that might need reinterpretation to guide Indian's life in the modern situation. It was this situation where western culture and Christianity on the one side and Indian culture and Hinduism on the other confronted each other under the shadow of colonialism that led to the emergence Hindu religious renaissance. And the resurgent Hindu religious fervour responded to the challenges posed by the English missions. In the next chapter a survey of various responses to the Christian missions is attempted.

## CHAPTER 5

# **RESPONSES TO CHRISTIAN MISSIONS**

5.1	Background:	Socio- religions	movements o	f nineteenth
	century			

- 5.1.1 The Brahmo Samaj
- 5.1.2 The Arya Samaj
- 5.1.3 The Ramakrishna Mission
- 5.2 Modern Hindu responses
  - 5.2.1 Bal Gangadhar Tilak
  - 5.2.2 Hindutva
  - 5.2.3 M.S. Golwalkar
  - 5.2.4 The Sangh Parivar
  - 5.2.5 The RSS
  - 5.2.6 The VHP
  - 5.2.7 The BJP
- 5.3 Mahatma Gandhi

#### CHAPTER FIVE

### RESPONSES TO CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

# 5.1 Back ground: Socio-religious movements of nineteenth-century

As pointed out in the previous chapter, nineteenth Century India experienced a socio-religious ferment of unprecedented intensity spear headed by what is known as the Socio-Religious Movements. The most important among them were the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj and the Ramakrishna Mission. The Theosophical society also contributed to this ferment. These movements contributed substantially towards the formation of a higher level of consciousness and self-confidence required for responding to the challenge posed by the evangelical missions. Many causes have combined to create the socio-religious movement in India. Most of the stimulating forces may be traced to the western influence. As J.N. Farquar says:

"The causes which have combined to create the movement are many. The stimulating forces are almost exclusively western, viz. the British Government, English education, literature, Christianity, oriental research, European Science and Philosophy and the material elements of the western civilization. While the shaping force at work in the movement have been many, it is

quite clear that Christianity has ruled the development throughout"<sup>1</sup>.

At the same time, as the result of researches and writings of great orientlists like Max Muller, Charles Wilkins, and Monier Williams and Edward Said there also developed a growing interest in the awareness of the greatness of India's culture. The educated Indians, particularly the Hindus, became conscious of their rich cultural heritage and began to feel that, although subject to British rule, they were not inferior to the Europeans in any respect. Even more important in this respect was the contribution of the prominent Indian religious leaders of the nineteenth century. Their teachings showed the way of reforming Indian society on the basis of indigenous inspiration. And they instilled in educated Indians a pride in their own religion and culture which had been severely shaken by the establishment of British rule and the aggressive propaganda carried on by the Christian Missionaries. Some educated Indians reacted violently to the east-west polarity and the racial pride introduced by the British colonialists and missionaries. They sought to achieve a revitalization of the native culture, religion and society by affirming the self-sufficiency of the Indian tradition and its reinterpretation from within. Further, they sought to effect a counter offensive to Christianity. They decided to rally all the forces of Hinduism against the spread of "foreign" religion and

J.N. Farquhar, <u>Modern Religious Movements in India</u> (London: Macmillan Co. Ltd, 1929) 433.

meet it on its own ground. Noted historian R.C. Majumdar termed the Hinduism thus developed as 'resurgent Hinduism' or 'Neo-Hinduism'<sup>2</sup>.

The fervent and open condemnation of the nations' religions was countered with equally vehement approbation of it by its protagonists. India needed no foreign religion, they said. Indian religious traditions were superior to the religion of the white man. Thus enlightened Hindus created a kind of religious nationalism, which asserted that India was essentially spiritual, and that Indian culture was superior to the western civilization, which was essentially materialistic. This glorification of the national religion infused a sense of superiority into the followers of Hinduism and Indian culture. It was most strongly articulated, and successfully propagated by Swami Vivekananda. He used religion to instill national pride among Hindus because of his conviction that religion constituted the core of Hindu's life. He emphasised that while for other nations religion was one among many occupations here in India it was the 'one and only occupation of life'. "India's gift to the world is the light spiritual", he wrote and went on to say:

"In this land are, still, religion and spirituality, the fountains which will have to overflow and flood the world to bring it new life and vitality to the western and other nations, which

Neo Hinduism is a name given to a modern school of interpretation which set forth ancient orthodox tenets of Hinduism in new categories so as to defend the religion against certain criticism. Refer R.C. Majumdar, ed. <u>The History & Culture of Indian People Vol. 10</u> (Bombay: Bharathiya Vidya Bhavan, 1981) 115.

are now almost borne down, half-killed, and degraded by political ambitions and social scheming...in spite of the sparkle and glitter of western civilization, in spite of its polish and its marvelous manifestation of power, standing upon this platform, I tell them to their face that it is all vain. It is vanity of vanities...the secret of a true Hindu's character lies in the subordination of his knowledge of European sciences and learning, of his wealth, position, and name, to that one principle theme which is inborn in every Hindu child- the spirituality and purity of the race"<sup>3</sup>.

This statement in fact summarises the perspective that guided all the socio-religious movements of the period. Now we will take a closer look at how they responded to the challenge posed by Christian missions.

### 5.1.1 The Brahmo Samaj: intellectual and moderate response– Raja Ram Mohun Roy (1772-1833)

The pioneer among the modern Hindu leaders to meet the criticism of Hinduism and Indian culture by the western missionaries was Raja Ram Mohun Roy. Affirming his faith in the core tenets of Hinduism as contained in the Upanishads he felt that reform had to be carried out from within Hinduism and the Hindu community. Ram Mohun Roy preached against idol-worship and argued that it was a

Bimal Prasad, ed. <u>Swami Vivekananda – An Anthology</u> (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1995) 140-143.

latter accretion and not enjoined by the early scriptures. As a seeker after truth, he studied Hebrew and Greek to understand Christianity better. But his scholarship attracted him to European liberalism. He rejected Christianity but accepted the wider humanism of European thought, its ethics and its general approach to the problems of life. His study of other religions convinced him that below their dogmas, rituals, and superstitions there lay hidden a common core of rational religion and humanitarian ethics. He also took a stand against the caste system, seclusion of women, child marriage, sati, and the ban on widow remarriage. He strongly promoted English education as the main instrument for reform. In 1828 he founded an organisation called the Brahmo Sabha. This later developed into the Brahmo Samaj. His book, The Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness, is an interpretation of Christianity in the light of his scholarship. K.M. Panikkar says; "Brahmo Samaj was not in its essence a Christian dilution of Hinduism, as often been said, but a synthesis of the doctrines of the European enlightment with the philosophical views of the Upanishads. As a religion Brahmo Samaj was based firmly on the Vedanta of genuine Hindu tradition, but its outlook on life was neither Christian nor Hindu but European and derived its inspiration from the intellectual movement of the eighteenth century".<sup>4</sup> It was the intellectual's rather than everyman's response to the western challenge<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> K.M.Panikkar, <u>Asia and Western Dominance</u> op.cit.: 241.

Percival Smith, ed. <u>The Orthodox History of India</u> (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981) 730-731.

# 5.1.2 The Arya Samaj: Radical response–Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883)

Whereas Ram Mohun Roy went to the Upanishads for his inspiration, the founder of Arya Samaj, Swami Dayananda, relied on the four Vedas of the Hindu tradition. His militant message was "Back to the Vedas and India for Indians". He was devoted, emphatic, and militant. Dayananda disapproved of Bramo Samajists' complaisance towards Christianity. Like the Christian missionaries he denounced idolatry, polygamy, and caste. His emphasis was on ritual purification, social reform. Vedic education and Suddhi movement for reconversion to Hinduism of those who accepted other religions<sup>7</sup>. He preached to return to the simplicity of the Vedic rituals and the austerity of Vedic manners, and maintained that truth could only be found in the four Vedas. The Arva Samaj taught that Vedic religion was the only religion revealed by God for all and call those who do not believe in the Vedas atheist. Dayananda considered those who did not advocate Vedic faith as 'hypocrites', 'imposters', 'defrauders', and 'tricksters'<sup>8</sup>. Arya Samaj's attitude to other religions was strongly condemnatory, predominantly aggressive. Dayananda intolerant and negative, condemned Christianity as 'a hollow religion', 'a barbarous religion', and 'a false religion' believed only by fools and by the people in a state of barbarism. For Dayananda Islam also is a 'false religion' that did

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Quoted in Joachim Wietzke, ed. <u>P.D. Devanandan Vol.II</u> op.cit. 295.

Harold G. Coward, ed. <u>Modern Indian Response to Religious Pluralism</u> (New Delhi: Satguru, 1991) 59.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> P.L. John Panicker, Communalism in India (Kottayam: P.L. John Panicker, 1995) 61.

nothing but harm and was to be utterly discarded<sup>9</sup>. He looked for a world in which all the existing religions would vanish and the Vedic religion would reign supreme. Arya Samaj's reform was to revive, rejuvenate and restore the pure religion of the land. Dayananda bound the Vedic religion with the land of India. He effected a marriage between religion and politics, which resulted in the politicisation of religion and a sacralisation of politics. This paved the way for the development and interpretation of Indian nationalism in religious terms. So loyalty to the nation came to be equated with loyalty to Hindu religion and culture<sup>10</sup>.

Swami Dayananda aimed at unifying India around Hinduism and secure the expulsion of Islam and Christianity from India as they were alien faiths. Organised efforts were made to reconvert the Hindus who had embraced alien faiths. *Suddhi* and *Sanghathan*\* movements were launched to generate a new spirit and militancy among the Hindus. *Suddhi* or reconversion movement was thus used by Arya Samajists to pay back in the same coin of the converters from Hinduism. To Quote from <u>Arya Samaj and Raj</u>: "In this undertaking Arya Samaj came into direct conflict with the proselytizing work of the mosalman mullah and the Christian missionary"<sup>11</sup>. In fact the Arya Samajist and Hindu nationalist leaders like

P.L. John Panicker, <u>Communalism in India</u> (Kottayam: P.L.John Panicker, 1995)
 61- 62.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Ibid.: 60.

<sup>\*</sup> Suddhi means to reconvert or reclaim Hindus now in Islam or Christianity. Sanghathan means consolidation of Hindu community where by Hinduism can attain strength.

Shiv Kumar Gupta, <u>Arya Samaj and the Raj</u> (New Delhi: Gitanjali Publishing, 1991) 177.

Lajpat Rai by their militant confrontationist posture against the British Raj accentuated a sharp sense of communal feeling along with national pride and thus caused a division among the masses of Punjab on religious lines. T.N. Madan says: "Arva Samaj was a fundamentalist movement among Hindus, which rested upon a radical reinterpretation of the Hindu religious tradition in the cosmological, theological, scriptural, ethnical and socialcultural aspect"12. Emphasis on ethnical root and reinterpretation of Hindu religious tradition on its basis were the contributions of Arya Samaj to Hindu nationalism<sup>13</sup>. The Arya Samaj's policy of *Suddhi* and Sanghatan had immensely influenced the Sangh Parivar organisations (RSS, VHP, Bajarangdal, BJP) as is clear from their agenda of reconverting more and more tribals and adivasis who had embraced Christianity. It may be argued that Sangh Parivar in contemporary India is perpetuating some of the policies of the Arya Samaj which adopt a confrontationist attitude towards the non-Hindu religions in India. The Akhil Bharathiya Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram in Madhya Pradesh established by BJP M.P. Dilip Singh Judeo for reconversion of adivasis and tribals may be cited as example. Christian circles condemned this activity as highly coercive exercise <sup>14</sup>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> T.N. Madan, <u>Modern Myths, Locked Minds-Secularism and fundamentalism in India</u> (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997) 226.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Uday Mahurkar and Sheela Raval, "Politics by other Means", <u>INDIA TODAY</u> January 25, 1999: 28-32.

# 5.1.3 The Ramakrishna Mission: Absolutistic response-Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902)

Ramakrishna Mission was founded in Calcutta by Vivekananda in 1897 with two fold purpose: to spread the teachings of *vedanata* as embodied in the life of the Hindu saint Ramakrishna Paramahamsa\* and to improve the social condition of the Indian people.

Vivekananda maintained that all religions were in essence one. The fact that religions were one in essence did not deny the differences among religions but only maintained that difference were only in external and secondary details but in essence they were all one and the same <sup>15</sup>. In a sense Vivekananda was articulating the ideas of Ramakrishana his master. Ramakrishna saw God in everything and in everyone. All paths, he believed led to the same goal <sup>16</sup>.

In his address to the Parliament of Religions in 1893 in the U.S.A Vivekananda emphasized that there was a germ of truth in all religions and therefore all the various views of religions were true<sup>17</sup>.

The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda Vol.1 (Calcutta: Advaita Ashram, 1976-79) 124, 318.

<sup>\*</sup> Ramakrishna Paramahamsa is the first modern Hindu religious saint who taught the essential unity of all religions. Through his own spiritual experience he realised the Hindu tenet that all religions are paths to the same god.

The New Encyclopaedia Britannica Vol. 9 15<sup>th</sup> edition (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., 1997) 917. He says the Hindus draw out the liquid and call it *jal* the Muslims draw out the liquid and call it *pani* and the Christians draw out the liquid and call it water, but it is all the same substance, no essential difference.

<sup>17</sup> Bimal Prasad, op. cit.: 3-6.

Therefore, Indians accepted all religions as true. All of them were expressions of truth and were different perceptions of God.

If all religions are true and one in essence, the question arises as to why there are so many religions in the world. Vivekananda said that each persons is distinct from the other in nature, tendencies etc. Each person saw God in his own way, according to his own nature and inclinations that resulted inevitable various visions or views of God. This provided space for different religions, methods or paths <sup>18</sup>. Hence he pointed out that any attempt to bring all human kind under one religion was doomed to failure <sup>19</sup>. Vivekananda further attempted to prove that holiness, purity and charity were not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world and that every system had provided men and women of the most exalted character <sup>20</sup>. Further, it was to be noted that, India was the only country where there never had been religious persecutions, where there never was any man disturbed for his religious faith.

Vivekananda suggested that each person must attain perfection in his own religion because one's hereditary religion was the best suited for him. Therefore, he said: "The Christian is not to become a Hindu or Buddhist, or Hindu or Buddhist become a Christian. But

The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda Vol. 2 op. cit.: 369, 381, 385.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Ibid.: 363, 384.

Swami Jyothirmayanand, ed. <u>Vivekananda-His Gospel of Man-Making</u> (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1988) 51.

each must assimilate the spirit of others yet preserve his individuality and grow according to the law of growth"<sup>21</sup>.

Vivekananda rejected both the exclusive truth claim and superiority of any religion. Since his success at the Parliament of Religions in 1893 his views influenced the shaping of a new political consciousness among Hindus. Consequently Vivekananda was called the father of modern Indian nationalism.

The views and ideals of Vivekananda are important because they have immensely influenced many militant Hindu organisations in contemporary India. These organisations highlight the teachings of Vivekananda and use them to counter the Christian missionary arguments and conversion activities in India.

### 5.2 Modern Hindu responses

English education made an impact in all spheres and activities of Indian life. Political, social, art and literature etc. It created a longing for enlightment, patriotism and nationalism<sup>22</sup>. This nationalism was basically composite. Though it was composite in nature, many sub streams were alive and active within the mainstream Indian nationalism. The chief characteristic of one of the sub-stream nationalism was its inherent militancy and pre-occupation with Hindu religious symbols. To counter the British policies and Muslim

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Bimal Prasad, op. cit.: 20.

Hugald Grafe, op.cit.: 199.

communalism a new religious consciousness and a resisting face of Hinduism began to emerge in the twentieth century. While nineteenth century was significant for the emergence of Hindu religious movements, the twentieth century has witnessed two powerful emotions growing side by side supporting and strengthening each other i.e., love for one's own nation and love for one's own religion. Religion was defined and understood in terms of nation and nation was defined primarily as a geographical or territoriality unit. This has resulted in the interdependent growth of militant nationalism, and religious fundamentalism, which together led to the emergence of organisations. Gyanendra Pandey says this kind of militant consciousness of the relation between religion and territory promoted the idea that India is Hindustan, the land of Hindus<sup>23</sup>. J.N. Farquar calls this consciousness of the religious nationalism<sup>24</sup>. Christophe Jaffrelot refers to it as Hindu nationalism<sup>25</sup>. Hindu nationalism emphasizes the revival of ancient Hindu traditions and pit itself against the composite Indian nationalism, which Hindu nationalists allege is built on western ideas. Thus, it may be said that, there are two predominant nationalisms in India, Indian nationalism and Hindu nationalism. The nexus between nationalism and religion in pre-independent India directly contributed to the defence and promotion of Hinduism. The seed of religious

Gyanendra Pandey, "Hindus and Others", <u>EPW</u> December 28, 1991: 2997 - 3009.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> J.N. Farquhar, op.cit.: 355-56.

Christophe Jaffrelot, "Hindu Nationalism: Strategic Syncretism in Ideology Building", <u>EPW</u> March 20-27, 1993: 517.

nationalism was sown in the Punjab by the Arya Samaj, in Bengal it was promoted by the writings of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhya, Swami Vivekananda and others. It grew as a mighty tree in Maharashtra under the patrnage of Lokmanya Bal Gangadhara Tilak (1856-1920), Vir Savarkar (1883-1943) and his Hindu Mahasabha, Dr. K.B. Hedgewar (1889-1940) and his RSS and of late the VHP that hold itself responsible for the defence and promotion of Hinduism<sup>26</sup>.

### 5.2.1 Bal Gangadhar Tilak

The most outstanding leader among the nationalists who favoured a militant band of nationalism was Bal Gangadhar Tilak. He made excellent use of his great flair for journalism to mould public opinion in favour of his political aims and objectives. He founded two news papers one in English called the *Maratha* and the other in Marathi called the *Kesari* Tilak sought to widen the popularity of the nationalist movement by invoking popular traditions of the Maratha struggle against Muslim rule. In order to instill the spirit of patriotism and nationalism in the Hindu masses, Tilak revived the Shivaji, Ganapati festivals by converting the celebrations into public ceremonies, with religious recitation and worship. Tilak used these celebrations to heighten militancy among Hindus and to oppose colonial rule. He also invoked religious sentiments for the mobilization of the Hindu masses against the British. Stanley Wolpert said: "Tilak used the unique popular appeal of Hinduism most astutely to weld his

P.L. John Panicker, op.cit.: 69.

mass following into a cultural nationalist body"<sup>27</sup>. As pointed out by Wolpert, the grass roots of Indian cultural nationalism were thus tapped for the first time<sup>28</sup>. When Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of India partitioned Bengal in 1905, Tilak strongly supported the Bengali demand for the annulment of the partition and advocated a boycott of British goods. It soon became a movement that swept across the Tilak wrote a commentary on the Bhagawad Gita -Gita nation. Rahasya- in which he discarded the orthodox interpretation that the Bhagavad Gita taught the ideal of renunciation. Tilak argued that the Gita taught selfless service to humanity. Gita Rahasya of Tilak stands out as, perhaps, the major philosophical work of the Indian nationalist movement and was characterised by Gandhi despite his disagreement with some aspects of it, as a "master work commentary on the Gita"<sup>29</sup>. In addition to Tilak leaders like B.C. Pal, Aurobindo Ghosh and Lala Lajpatrai were also exponents of the militant religious nationalism. Later historians have made the assessment that, while their militant anti-imperialism meant a great leap in national consolidation, the Hindu tinge imparted to it weakened the process of national unification and contributed to bitter harvest of communalism in later years<sup>30</sup>.

Stanley Wolport, <u>A New History of India</u> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) 260-61.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

Verinder Grover, ed. <u>Bal Gangadhar Tilak</u> (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 1990) 4.

Bipan Chandra, et.al, <u>Freedom Struggle</u> (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1994) 90.

#### 5.2.2 Hindutva

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar was the proponent of Hindutva ideology. He made a clear distinction between Hinduism and Hindutva. By Hinduism Savarkar meant the various theologies or systems of religion Hindus follow, while Hindutva means Hinduness and it embraces all the department of thought and activity of the whole being of Hindu race. Hindutva includes religious, cultural, linguistic, social and political aspects of the life of the Hindus<sup>31</sup>.

Hindutva as a concept or constellation of concepts-started emerging in the early decades of the twentieth century along with Indian nationalism as a reaction against the communal politics promoted by the British. Savarkar defined the term Hindutva as a coherent pattern of concepts. It advocated the elimination of flexibility and pluralism, which were fundamental in the earlier constructs of Hinduism. Hindutva aimed to achieve great hegemony over society by asserting that majority Hindus alone constitutes the true Indian nation. In other words what the majority constitutes is the Indian nation.

The central ideas of Hindutva were formulated by V.D. Savarkar and published in his book <u>Hindutva</u>: <u>Who is a Hindu?</u> Savarkar's main aim was to seek and provide a common factor for unifying all sections of Hindus. In an effort to overcome the sectoral differences among Hindus he made a distinction between Hinduism

Brenda Cossman and Ratna Kapur, "Secularism: Bench-Marked by Hindu Right", <u>EPW</u> September 21, 1996: 2617.

and Hindutva claiming that Hinduism was only a part of Hindutva and Hindutva embraced all the thoughts and activities of the whole Hindu race<sup>32</sup>. Savarkar emphasised the point that 'India is a state while Hindus are the nation in it'. He considered the majority that was the Hindus, as the only or true nation and the minorities a totally different race<sup>33</sup>. In Savarkar's definition *Pithrubhumi* (fatherland) was equated with Punyabhumi (holy land) and a Hindu was a person who regarded the land of Bharatvarsha from Indus (in the North) to Seas (in the East, West and South) as his fatherland as well as his holy land. Territoriality thus became the starting point in Savarkar's Hindutva ideology<sup>34</sup>. He defined Hindus further as the people native to Bharatvarsha those who inherited Indian civilization, common cultural heritage and allegiance to a particular sacred geography and singular cultural aspirations<sup>35</sup>. "Pithrubhumi-Punyabhumi" According Savarkar's (Fatherland-Holyland) equation, those who accepted *Bharatvarsha*, as *Punyabhumi* were the true inhabitants of this land, all others were aliens. It is an indirect assertion that Hindus 'alone are the true sons of the soil'. Savarkar concluded his argument by saying that: "As Germans in Germany are a nation and the Jews therein are a race; as Turks in Turkey are a nation and the Arabs there are a race, so Hindus in India are a nation, while Muslims,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> K.N. Panikkar, <u>Communal Threat Secular Challenge</u> (Madras: Earthworm Books, 1997) X

Quoted in D.N.B.Pandit, ed. <u>Hindutva as a Political Ideology, in Fundamentalism& Secularism: The Indian Predicament</u> (Madras: Gurukul Summer Institute, 1994) 162.

David Ludden, Making India Hindu (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998) 274.

Christians Jews are races in India"<sup>36</sup>. As Christophe Jeffrelot commented, Savarkar rejected any form of nation state based on social contrast and emphasized the ethnic and racial substance of the nation<sup>37</sup>.

By this logic all except Hindus are extricated of the right to call themselves Indians as their punayabhoomi is alleged to be not in India. These communities are projected as aliens even without their knowing or wanting it, because of their alleged extra-territorial loyalties. Now the Hindu fundamentalists want the Indian Christians and Muslims to give up what they unilaterally characterize as either their extra-territorial loyalty or their lack of territorial loyalty and merge into what they call the Hindu race. According to Savarkar as religions like Buddhism and Jainism share a common ground with Hinduism they owe their affiliation to a common *rashtra*, common *jati* and a common *sanskriti*, which are the three principles of Hindutva and therefore are part of the Hindu nation <sup>38</sup>.

By this definition of Hindutva Savarkar divided the Indian people vertically as Hindus and non-Hindus. This would generate two nationalisms i.e., Indian nationalism and Hindu nationalism which would reject the very concept of the composite culture (of India). This would invariably promote communalism and lead to the

Satish Deshpande, "Communalising the Nation-Space Notes on Spatial Strategies of Hindutva" EPW December 16, 1995: 3220-3227.

Christophe Jeffrelot, <u>The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India</u> (New Delhi: Viking, 1996) 31.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> D.N.B.Pandit, op.cit: 163.

P.D.Mathew, <u>Hinduism, Hindutva & Secularism</u> (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1999) 61.

communalization of politics in India and would place the non-Hindus under the cloud of suspicion, making them even victims of hatred and hostility. It was Savarkar's advocacy of Hindutva ideology that enabled the concept of cultural exclusivism to carve out a space for it self in contemporary Indian cultural discourse and practice.

#### 5.2.3 M. S. Golwalkar

Golwalkar was indisputably the greatest ideologue of the RSS besides being its chief. His writings clearly took Savarkar's Hindutva as the starting point of his arguments though he used the term 'Cultural nationalism' for what Savarkar meant by Hindutva. He gave emphasis to the cultural tradition of India. He wrote that; "life is higher and wider than politics, the vital component of life is not politics but culture" He argued that religion and culture were synonymous and the Indian nationalism was Hindu in culture. For this he rejected the anti-colonial nationalism that emerged in India. Dismissing anti-colonial nationalism as negative, Golwalkar sought to construct the idea of Hindu cultural nationalism by tracing a logical connection between culture, religion and nation 40. For elaborating cultural nationalism he took the Nazi German sources for guidance. Golwalkar's writings bear testimony to the fact that German ethnic and cultural nationalism influenced him deeply. Commenting on this Tapan Bose said:

K.N. Panikkar, op.cit.: 91.

<sup>40</sup> K.N. Panikkar, op.cit.: 91.

"German national pride has now become a topic of the day. To keep up the purity of the nation and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging of the country of the Semitic race- the Jews. National pride at the highest has been manifested here...a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by".

Golwalkar claimed that Hindus alone were indigenous, and true sons of the soil<sup>42</sup>. He rejected multi-ethnic existence. In his book <u>Bunch of Thoughts</u> he dealt separately with internal and external threats to Indian society where Muslims, Christians, and Communists were presented as internal threats to India<sup>43</sup>. Golwalkar's formulation of communal ideology based on the concept of Hindu Rashtra bore the stamp of fascist ideology of Germans where anti-Semitism was highly pronounced.

According to Golwalkar, though the minorities like Muslims and Christians had inherited along with Hindus a common fatherland, a common law, custom and history, they could not be recognized as part of the national community because they stood in opposition to the majority national community, the Hindus in many respects. The requisite mental allegiance of Muslims and Christians to Indian culture was in

Tapan Basu & Others, <u>Khaki Shorts Saffron Flag</u> ( Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1993) 8.

P.L. John Panicker, op. cit.: 66.

M.S.Golwalkar, <u>Bunch of Thoughts</u> (Bangalore : Jagarana Prakashana, 1980) 239.

doubt as they were here "either as guests, the Jews and Parsis, or as invaders, the Muslims and Christians", So Cultural nationalism (Hindutva) meant establishing a Hindu Rashtra-a Hindu state based on Hindu way of life. This is what contemporary Hindu ideologues also continue to emphasise. For example, on the question who is a Hindu, RSS leader Seshadri writes, Hindu is not the name of a religious faith like 'Muslim and Christian'. It denotes a national way of life here. All those who feel firmly committed to the unity and sanctity of our country and our people and look upon our great forebears as their national heroes and the sublime values of our point of veneration and emulation are all Hindus<sup>45</sup>.

For Golwalkar any group that questioned or posed a threat to this national way of life and its values by religious conversion, desecration of the place of worship or the memory of the great sons of this soil were "anti national". Non-Hindu "races" like Muslims and Christians were to be dubbed as foreign races, because these races refused to merge into the common stream of Hindu traditions, which constitutes the nationhood of Bharat. He called the work of Christian missions and particularly the conversion of Hindus as anti-national. Opposing all philanthropic activities of Christian missionaries Golwalkar vehemently contended:

<sup>44</sup> M.S. Golwalkar, op.cit: 182.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> H.V.Sheshadri, ed. <u>RSS a Vision in Action</u> (Bangalore: Jagarana Prakashana, 1988) 1-20.

"As the Christians were indulging in such activities and consider themselves as agents of the international movement for the spread of Christianity and refuse to offer their first loyalty to the land of their birth and behave as true children of the heritage and culture of their ancestors, they will remain as hostile and will have to be treated as such" <sup>46</sup>.

According to Golwalkar, Hindus were constituted in opposition to religious minorities. Minorities were to be treated as enemies or subordinates of this nation and could not even be recognized as or accommodated as a legitimate part of this nation, which was a Hindu nation. In the book We; or Our Nationhood Defined Golwalkar wrote:

"The foreign races in Hindustan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion must entertain no idea but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture i.e., of the Hindu nation and must lost their separate existence to merge in the Hindu race, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment—not even citizens rights. There is, at least should be no other course for them to adopt",47.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> M. S. Golwalkar, op.cit.: 256.

M.S. Golwalkar, We; or Our Nationhood Defined (Nagpur: Bharat Prakashan, 1939) 47-48.

From the above it is clear that minorities like Christians and others can have only a lower status in the Hindu Nation of Golwalkar's conception. It will not grant any protection of minority rights within it<sup>48</sup>.

Savarkar's concept of Hindutva and Golwalkar's ideas on the Hindu nation immensely influenced many Hindu organisations. They accordingly, developed a certain level of militancy and cultural nationalism. Ninan Koshy observes that, the ideology of BJP has its origin in the writings of Savarkar and Golwalkar<sup>49</sup>. Intolerance to other cultural variants and socio-cultural subjugation of minority communities are the salient features of this ideology. They are translating these concepts into reality today. It aims at establishing Hindu hegemony over the society by asserting that Hindus alone constitute the Indian state and the nation.

### 5.2.4 The Sangh Parivar

It is an article of faith with the Sangh Parivar\* that Hindutva is the bedrock of Indian nationalism. It aims at organising all Hindus into one political community. As stated before, Savarkar and his ideological successors defined Indian nationalism on the basis of the Hindutva

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> Raizwan Quiser, "Communalism and the Conceptualisation of Hindu Rashtra", SOCIAL ACTION Vol. 4 January-March (1994): 94.

Ninan Koshy, "Secularism in India a new debate", <u>VISION</u> Vol. II No.2 July (1993): 91.

<sup>\*</sup> The RSS and its front organisations are today collectively referred as the Sangh Parivar. All the sister organisations (BJP, VHP, Bajrangadal, BMS, ABVP, Swadeshi Jagaran Munch) are bound by the common ideology of Hindu Nationalism.

principles. One of their strategies to achieve the realization of their objectives is to campaign against minority religious groups particularly Christians and Muslims by characterizing them as anti-nationals and invaders. The substance of their arguments is that India is Hindu nation; the Muslims and Christians are the foreign aggressors. The present thrust of their allegation against Christians is that Christian missionaries are mainly working for converting the poor and gullible Indians. Their social service activities are a mere ploy for the conversions, these conversions are done by inducement and/or force, and by using other fraudulent means. Religious conversion is an anti-national act as Christians have extra territorial loyalties. This is part of an international plot to evangelize India into Christian nation. If conversion is allowed to be carried out unchecked, Christians will eventually out number the Hindus and the country will become Christian and Hindus will be reduced to a minority<sup>50</sup>. Repeating this argument the Sangh Parivar attempt to mobilise the Hindu grass roots against conversions. But on closer scrutiny it can be seen that this argument is baseless because Christians constitute only 2.34 % of the Indian population and they, in no way, can out number 83% of Hindu population in the near, foreseeable future. It is also to be noted that Christian population in India has really gone down by 0.16% as the last census statistics shows.

P.R. Ram, "The not to hidden agenda of Sangh Parivar", <u>Indian Currents</u> March 1-7, 1999: 20.

It seems that Sangh Parivar is perpetuating the policy of Arya Samaj, i.e. triumph of one religion and destruction of others<sup>51</sup>.

However, on the basis of the above perception various constituent organisations of the Sangh Parivar have developed their own responses to the Christian missions. In the following pages an attempt is made to survey briefly the responses of 3 major constituents of the Sangh Parivar namely the RSS, the VHP and the BJP.

### **5.2.5** The RSS

Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar founded the RSS in 1925. There is a widely held view that Swami Dayananda Saraswati and the ideals of Hindu Mahasabha were the forerunners of the Sangh<sup>52</sup>. The ultimate aim of the RSS is Hindu political domination of India through cultural homogenization. From 1940 to 1973 Golwalkar was the head of the RSS. His philosophy, thinking and guidance helped the RSS to blossom into the well-knit national organisation that it is today. Golwalkar spelt out the RSS goal thus: "Our supreme goal is to bring to life the all round glory and greatness of our Hindu Rashtra". They differentiate the religious communities in India as insiders and

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<sup>51 &</sup>quot;The Crux of Uncertainty", <u>THE HINDU</u> February 1,1999. As per the 2001 census the current Christian population in India is estimated as 2.18%. For details refer Distribution of population by Religion since Independence (1951-2001) <u>INDIAN CHRISTIAN DIRECTORY</u> (Kottayam: RASHTRA DEEPIKA LTD, 2000) 37-41.

Dina Nath Mishra, <u>RSS: Myth and Reality</u> (Ghaziabad: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd. 1980) 1-7.

G.S.Bhalla, ed. <u>Indian Nation State and Communalism</u> (New Delhi: Patriot, 1989) 61.

outsiders. This results in deepening cleavage between the Hindus on the one side and the minority religions on the other<sup>54</sup>. The rhetoric used by the RSS is that the Hindu Rashtra faces a two fold threat to its existences; one from external enemies-mainly Pakistan- and the other from internal enemies—the minority religious groups particularly the Muslims and Christians. The patriotic Hindus particularly the enlisted members of the Sangh Parivar organisations are called upon to view their enemies, especially the internal enemies who are right in front of them with suspicion. Needless to say this leads not only to division in society but to militancy, conflict and eruption of violence.

ORGANISER the RSS mouthpiece raises a series of allegations against Christian missions on a regular basis. It argues that the loyalty of Indian Christians to India is now totally suspect. The Vatican has a goal to Christianize India, by destroying the Hindu religion by mass conversions especially in rural and tribal areas. The ORGANISER writes:

"They see the Hindus, because of their traditions of tolerance, as a soft target that is safe to convert by hook or by crook. Vatican officials, including the present Pope, have made no secret that the conversion of Hindus remains the highest priority".<sup>55</sup>.

G.S. Bhalla, ed. <u>Indian Nation State and Communalism</u> (New Delhi: Patriot, 1989)
 65.

N.S. Rajaram "The Vatican Agenda", <u>ORGANISER</u> Vol.L, No.25 January 17, 1999; 2.

Another article in ORGANISER says: "Let the church stop conversion and pave the way for a meaningful dialogue"56. The ORGANISER reported the same complaint against Christian educational institutions also. It alleges that through these institutions the Christian educators have launched a systematic programme of 'operation conversion'. They characterized the Christian educational institutions as "wolf in sheep's clothing"<sup>57</sup>. Another article was devoted to Nagaland, charging that the insurgency in the state was 'Church borne'. The ORGANISER even dubbed the humanitarian services done by Mother Teresa as an attempt to induce conversion. RSS further demanded that the constitution, which provides for the right to freedom of religion be amended to ban conversion<sup>58</sup>. Again in another issue the ORGANISER alleged that the church has drawn multi-pronged plan to reach out to the unreached people and to effect a complete 'Evangelization by 2000 in India'. The present RSS chief K. S. Sudarshan asked the central government of India to throw out all foreign Christian missionaries from India as they indulged in coerced and enticed conversion of vulnerable sections chiefly of Hindu society with the intent of alienating them from Hinduism. He asked Christian Churches to sever their foreign allegiance and remain true to the indigenous culture by establishing Swadeshi

Promod Kumar, "Who is converting whom", <u>ORGANISER</u> Vol.L, No.9 September 27, 1998: 9-12.

Jyothi Lal Chowdhury, "Role of the Church in Mizoram polls", <u>ORGANISER</u> Vol.L, No.24 January 10, 1999: 10-11.

Shyam Khosla, "Ban Conversion", <u>ORGANISER</u>, and Vol.L, No.26 Republic Day Special issue January 24, 1999: 20- 27. M. V. Kamath, "What shall we do now"?, <u>ORGANISER</u> Vol.L, No.30 February 21, 1999: 6 & N.S. Rajaram, "Vatican's warriors", <u>ORGANISER</u> Vol.L. No.31 February 28, 1999: 7.

Churches<sup>59</sup>. RSS ideologue Seshadri sees in missionary activities a conspiracy to destabilize the government of India. The BJP led central Government is the victim now to a smear campaign by Church sponsored outfits leading the 'Operation Topple-99' in support of Evangelization 2000<sup>60</sup>. He asserts the Nobel Prize given to Prof. Amartya Sen is described as part of 'Christian conspiracy to propagate Christianity and wipe out Hinduism from this country'. This allegation centres around the declaration made by Prof. Sen that he would like to use the award money for spreading literacy. This would benefit the missionaries, says the ORGANISER (February 21,1999). Besides these campaigns, the RSS is reported to have even physically attacked missionaries in their attempt to prevent evangelization<sup>61</sup>.

#### **5.2.6** The VHP

The VHP was founded in 1964 by the same leaders of the Sangh. In fact there is nothing new about the VHP attitude to the minority religions. VHP's goal is to consolidate and strengthen the Hindu society to protect and promote ethical values of Hindus and to establish contact with the Hindus all over the world. The VHP runs

<sup>59 &</sup>quot;A Complete Indigenous Church", <u>THE TIMES OF INDIA</u> October 3, 2000. Shyam Khosla, "Need to review Article 25(1)", <u>ORGANISER</u> Vol.L, No.36 April 4, 1999: 7-8.

Seshadri Chari, "The toppling fronts tumble", <u>ORGANISER</u> Vol.L, No.29 February 14, 1999: 14. N.S. Rajaram, "A Postscript on Beyond Bofors", ORGANISER Vol.L, No.12 October 18, 1998: 7-9.

For details of attack on Christians refer <u>INDIA TODAY</u> June 26, 2000: 28 -31 and FRONT LINE February 12, 1999: 13-15.

schools, hostels, temples and medical centres. VHP may be called the missionary wing of the Sangh. It also seeks re-admission to all those Hindus who embraced Christianity or Islam in the past and are now willing to come back into the fold of Hinduism<sup>62</sup>. The VHP is an ideological ally of the RSS and works in close co-operation with the Sangh Parivar. VHP president Ashok Singhal has clearly stated that VHP is furthering Golwalkar's ideology that is cultural nationalism and minorities must adapt to the culture of the majority. He is specifically of the view that Bible and Quran should be taught and interpreted according to Indian culture.

The VHP does not oppose Islamic or Christian worship. According to its leaders the organisation is only opposed to Christian and Muslim fanatics who adopted an anti Hindu attitude and reject the culture and traditions of India. The main accusations of VHP against Christians are that they are anti-nationals, threat to the Hindu nation, and missionaries are militants. The solution proposed by VHP is that they should remain loyal to Indian ethos instead to foreign ideologies <sup>63</sup>.

S.S. Apte, the founder General Secretary of the VHP says that, Christianity, Islam and Communism are be dogmatic and intolerant of other religions, and they are out to make the whole world Christian or

Yogendra B. Malik & V.B.Singh, <u>Hindu Nationalists in India</u> (New Delhi: Vistar Publications, 1995) 167. G.N.S.Raghavan, "Fight the conversion menace", ORGANISER Vol.L, No.35 March 28, 1999:5

<sup>&</sup>quot;VHP to create Hindu Vote bank", <u>THE TIMES OF INDIA</u> February 8, 1999 & Rajesh Joshi, "Quran, Bible should be adapted to our tradition", <u>OUT LOOK</u> February 22, 1999: 16-17.

Muslim or Communist. His words really summarises the VHP attitude to minority religions:

"... All these three consider the Hindu society a fine rich food on which to feast and fatten themselves. It is therefore necessary in this age of competition and conflict to think of and organise the Hindu world to save itself from the evil eyes of all the three".64.

### **5.2.7** The BJP

With the formation of BJP in 1980 a new phase has emerged in the Hindutva movement. The BJP is the political offshoot of the RSS. In its ideological, organisational structure BJP is the direct descendent of Jana Sangh founded in 1951. The Jana Sangh an offshoot of RSS drew its ideology from the Hindu nationalism propagated by Savarkar, Golwalkar and Deendayal Upadhyaya. BJP believed in the reform-oriented traditions of Indian culture reflected in the reform movements led by such Hindu reformers as Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda, and Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak<sup>65</sup>. K.R. Malkani the former Vice-President of BJP claimed that the RSS-VHP-BJP linkage never deviated from the past shown by Vivekananda, Swami Dayananda etc<sup>66</sup>. A.G.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, "Hindu Nationalism: ", <u>EPW</u> op.cit. 517-520.

K. Jaya Prasad, <u>RSS and Hindu Nationalism</u> (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 1995) 262-263.

K.R. Malkani, "The BJP View of Nationalism, Secularism", <u>THE HINDU</u> August 9, 1991. Samar Halarnkar and Uday Mahurkar "Burning the Cross", <u>INDIA TODAY</u> January 11, 1999: 22-27.

Noorni asserts that the BJP's linkage with these organisations is both ideological and historical and all based on the inspiration from the RSS<sup>67</sup>.

It is clear from the above that the connection between BJP and Sangh Parivar constituents is both ideological and historical and therefore, the BJP position on minority religions and communities is also the same as that of the other major constituents. Many leaders of the BJP have called for a ban on religious conversions. The present Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has called for national debate to discuss the issue of religious conversion and exhorted missionaries to give up the policy of conversion<sup>68</sup>. In a way these leaders are only repeating the arguments of Golwalkar who had demanded the prohibition of conversion of non-Hindu religions.

Golwalkar stood for prohibiting conversion of Hindus to non-Hindu religions and term it as anti- national activity. Golwalkar had observed that these anti-national activities of the 'aliens' and 'hostiles' be put down with strong hand by all possible means<sup>69</sup>. Further Golwalkar argued that non-Hindus in India couldn't claim to be true sons of the soil. He had also demanded a re-examination and re-drafting of the Indian constitution as he claimed that the present constitution of India

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A.G. Noorni, "BJP New Sights", <u>FRONT LINE</u> No. 21 October 13 -26, 1990: 29 -32.

Bhavdeep Kang and Neeraj Mishra, "Pilgrim's Progress Revisited", <u>OUT LOOK</u> January 25 1999: 22- 27 & N.K. Trikha, "True story of the Dangs", ORGANISER Vol.L, No.35 March 28, 1999: 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> Golwlkar, <u>Bunch of Thoughts</u>, op.cit.: 224, 299, 230 & M.G.Vaidya, "Five points for National debate", <u>ORGANISER</u> Vol. L, No.28 February 7, 1999: 2.

has unfortunately equated the sons of the soil with the enemies of the nation. So he wanted a re-examination and re-drafting of the present Indian constitution constitution. The debate on re-examination and re-drafting of constitution is very lively in the contemporary India. The BJP government appointed a commission headed by former Supreme Court chief Justice Venkata Chellaiah to review and if necessary to re-drafting of the constitution of India. All these show that the BJP is adhering to line of the Sangh Parivar in perpetuating Hindutva ideology. BJP leaders proved this by repeating the same demand of the Hindutva ideologues Savarkar and Golwalkar. The track record the BJP government bear ample evidence to prove that they are out to establish the Hindu Rashtra of the dream of the above mentioned Hindutva ideologues<sup>71</sup>.

#### 5.3 Mahatma Gandhi

Gandhi was one of the leading lights of modern Indian renaissance. He did not favour religious disputes and exhorted that God wills all religions for the benefit of its votaries. He believed in the equality of all religions i.e., *Sarvadharma–Samabhava*. He was against conversion as practiced by the missionaries. He wishes mutual advocated trust and co-existence of religions instead of mistrust. He did not expect India to be wholly Christian or wholly Musalman or

Golwlkar, <u>Bunch of Thoughts</u>, op.cit.: 224, 299, 230 & M.G.Vaidya, "Five points for National debate", <u>ORGANISER</u> Vol. L, No.28 February 7, 1999: 2.

K.N. Panikkar, "Towards a Hindu Nation", <u>FRONT LINE</u> February 12, 1999: 19-21.

wholly Hindu but wanted it to be pluralistic and wholly tolerant of other religions existing here<sup>72</sup>. Further he opined that any religion which claimed that it is the only true religion, supreme, absolute and ultimate and condemning other religions as false by using aggressive words and unfair means will only generate communal tensions. He said, "We do not need to proselytize or do *Suddhi* or *Tabligh* through our speech or writings. We can do it really with our lives. Let them be open books for all to study. Would that I could persuade the missionary friends to take this view of their mission. Then there will be no distrust, no suspicion, no jealousy and dissension"<sup>73</sup>.

Gandhi too had addressed the problem of Hindu Christian hostility during his days and had suggested certain solutions to this problem. He had serious reservations about the claim of the Christian missions and their proselytizing activities. He told missionaries that, "if they could have refrained from 'telling' India about Christ and had merely lived a life enjoined upon them by the Sermon on the Mount, India instead of suspecting them would have appreciated their living in the midst of her children and directly profited by their presence"<sup>74</sup>. He wanted Christians to live the message of Christ rather than annotate it. He used to cite C.F. Andrew's life as that of a true Christian who instead of preaching gospel simply lives its message.

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Young India October 20, 1927.

Anand T. Hingaroni, ed. <u>To My Country Men</u> (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1972) 131.

Bharatan Kumarappa, ed. <u>Christian Missions Their Place in India</u> by M.K.Gandhi (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 2000) 118.

Since Gandhi's approach to the problem is the crucial part of the study the researcher has made an attempt to analyse Gandhi-Christian encounter in detail in the following chapters. It also investigates whether the guide lines proposed by him is a viable model for Christian mission work in the contemporary situation of India.

# **GANDHI AND THE CHRISTIAN MISSIONS**

6.1	Early contact with Christianity			
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- 6.13.7 Christianity is not an exclusive religion

#### **CHAPTER SIX**

## GANDHI AND THE CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

Gandhi considered all denominational religions to be essentially equal, though they differed in their external manifestations. They are he believed, "different roads converging on the same point". He argued: "What does it matter that we take different roads, so long as we reach the same goal"? Hence Gandhi did not support conversion while making intelligent exceptions. The missionaries, who were keen to make his strong opposition to their proselytizing activity less sharp, had discussed the topic of conversion with him many a time. His opposition to it was based both on theoretical and practical considerations. This will be discussed later. Before that a brief survey of Gandhi's contact with Christianity and the various Christian influences on him is attempted which will serve as a necessary background against which Gandhi's encounter with Christian missions can be understood properly.

# **6.1** Early contact with Christianity

Gandhi had gained a fairly good knowledge of all major religions except Christianity from the religious dialogues his father had

Bharatan.Kumarappa, ed. My Religion by M.K. Gandhi (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1995) 6.

with the followers of Jainism and Islam<sup>2</sup>. His first impressions of Christianity were received as a schoolboy in Rajkot, and that left in him a decidedly negative impression. In his autobiography Gandhi writes:

"In the days Christian missionaries used to stand in a corner near the high school and hold forth, pouring abuse on Hindus and their gods. I could not endure this. I must have stood there to hear them once only, but that was enough to dissuade me from repeating the experiments"<sup>3</sup>.

He also wrote that there was a rumour in the town when he was a boy that a well known Hindu, after his conversion to Christianity, had to eat beef, drink liquor and wear European clothing. This created a dislike in him for Christianity<sup>4</sup>.

When Gandhi wrote about this incident, Rev. H.R Scott who was the only missionary in Rajkot from 1883 to 1897 wrote a reply repudiating the allegations. As was his practice, Gandhi published this

M.K.Gandhi, <u>AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY OR The Story of my experiments with truth</u> (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Trust, 1994) 28-29.

G.C. Martin, <u>The Father of the Nation</u> (Madras: National Publishing Company, 1990) 22-23.

Gandhi wrote "... Surely, thought I, a religion that compelled one to eat beef, drink liquor and change ones own clothes did not deserve the name. I also heard that the new converts had already begun abusing the religion of his ancestors, their customs and their country. All these things created in me a dislike for Christianity. M.K.Gandhi, My experiments op.cit.:28-29.

repudiatory letter in Young India on March 4, 1926 <sup>5</sup>, with the following comment:

"About beef-eating and wine-drinking at baptism I have merely stated what I heard and I have said as much in my writing. And whilst I accept Mr. Scott's repudiation I must say that though I have mixed freely among thousands of Christian Indians, I know very few who have scruples about eating beef or other flesh meats and drinking intoxicating liquor".

Later in South Africa Gandhi had told Rev. Joseph Doke, his first biographer, that although he never spoke to Scott in his school days, later, I got to know him and to admire him<sup>7</sup>.

Gandhi's first encounter with Christians was very disappointing. The glaring gulf between profession and practice, the way in which converts were made and the fact that the they seemed to

Rev. Scott wrote: "I am specially interested in your account of those early days in Rajkot, because my first 14 years in India were spent in Kathaivada, one year in Gogha and 13 years in Rajkot. I was the only missionary in Rajkot during these years( from 1883 to 1897) and what you say about Christian missionaries in Rajkot standing at a corner near the High school and pouring abuse on Hindus and their gods fill me with painful wonder. I certainly never preached at a corner near the High school. Bharatan Kumarappa, ed. <a href="https://creativecommons.org/linearized-content-near-the-near-th

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Joseph J Doke, M.K.Gandhi An Indian Patriot in South Africa (Wardha: Akhil Bharat Seva Sangh,1959) 31. However there are Christians who hold a different view. Chandran Devanesan for example says that Gandhi never truly rose from the early emotional reaction to missionary activities in Rajkot. Refer Chandran Devanesan, The Making of the Mahatma (Madras: Orient Longman, 1969) 46.

look upon aping their foreign mentors in matters of dress and food as part and parcel of their conversion, all grated on a sensibility which had already been schooled in a discipline of a very different mould. As Margaret Chatterjee pointed out, the spirit of gentleness, allowing a man to pursue his *swadharma*, his own faith, respecting the faiths of others, was ingrained in young Gandhi and the militancy of the missionaries with their talk of "saving souls", as if everyone else lived in darkness, created an impression in Gandhi's mind which only years spent in London and South Africa were able to modify<sup>8</sup>.

# 6.2 Days in London

It may be said that Gandhi's real contact with Christianity began in London where he went to study law in 1888. Towards the end of the second year of his study, he met two Theosophists brothers who told him about the English translation of the *Gita*, The Song Celestial by Sir Edwin Arnold and about Madame Blavatsky's Key to Theosophy. They also introduced him to Madame Blavatsky and Mrs. Annie Besant. Although his two friends tried to make him join the Theosophical movement he politely declined saying, "with my meagre knowledge of my own religion I do not want to belong to any religious body". At the instance of the brothers Gandhi read Blavatsky's Key to Theosophy and it stimulated him to read books on Hinduism and he

Margaret Chatterjee, <u>Gandhi's Religious Thought</u> (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd..1983) 16.

M.K. Gandhi, My experiments op. cit. :58.

added that this books 'disabused me of the notion fostered by the missionaries that Hinduism was rife with superstition' 10.

He narrated his Rajkot recollection to a Christian friend. He was pained to hear that and asserted Gandhi that neither meat eating nor drinking was advocated by Christian scriptures. He gave Gandhi a copy of the Bible and asked him to read it. Gandhi purchased from his friend an edition of the Bible containing maps, concordance, and other aids for help in his study of the Bible. Gandhi did not like the Old Testament particularly the book of Numbers. But he was impressed with the New Testament, especially the Sermon on the Mount, which in his words; "went straight to my heart" He was also impressed with such verses as: "But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on they right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man takes away thy coat let him have thy cloak too" 12.

Gandhi admitted that these verses delighted him beyond measure and reminded him of the lines of the Gujarat poet Shamal Bhatt, which he used to hum as a child: "for a bowl of water, give a goodly meal"<sup>13</sup>. He said, his young mind tried to unify the teachings of the *Gita*, the <u>Light of Asia</u> and the Sermon on the

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Homer A. Jack, ed. <u>The Gandhi Reader</u> (Madras: Samata Books, 1983)23-23.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Subrata Mukerjee&Susila Ramaswamy eds. <u>Facets of Mahatma Gandhi</u> (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications,1994) 241.

Mount, and admitted that renunciation as the highest form of religion appealed to him greatly <sup>14</sup>.

Apart from this Gandhi attended some Church services and heard preachers like C.H. Spurgen and Archdeacon Farrar. But the message did not create in him any impression. But Dr. Parker's Thursday mid-day talks at the city temple attracted him and Gandhi said: "It was his appeal to the thoughts of young men that laid hold of me" On the whole, these influences kindled Gandhi's curiosity in religious matters rather than attracting him towards Christianity in particular.

#### 6.3 Critical maturing phase in South Africa

In South Africa (where he went in 1893) Gandhi came into contact with number of influential Christians such as the court interpreter Mr. Paul, a Roman Catholic, and Mr. Subhan Godfrey, then a teacher under Protestant Mission and father of Mr. James Godfrey who as a member of South African deputation that visited India in 1924. In Pretoria Gandhi met Mr. A.W. Baker who besides being an attorney, was a staunch lay preacher. According to Gandhi, Baker upheld the excellence of Christianity from various points of view and contended that it was impossible to find eternal peace, unless

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> J.N. Uppal, <u>Gandhi Ordained in South Africa</u> (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1995)15.

Joseph J. Doke, op.cit.: 51.

one accepted Jesus as the only son of God and the Saviour of mankind <sup>16</sup>.

On invitation, Gandhi attended for some time a prayer meeting held in Mr. Baker's office at one 0' clock everyday. There he met people like Miss. Harris, Miss. Gab, Mr. Coates and others. Prayers in these meetings were supplications to God on various things, according to each person's desire. A prayer was added for Gandhi's welfare as follows: "Lord, show the path to the new brother who has come amongst us. Give him, Lord, the peace that thou hast given us. May Lord Jesus who has saved us save him too. We ask all this in the name of Jesus" Naturally such prayer gave rise to many questions in Gandhi's mind.

Coates took Gandhi to other Christian friends and gave him several books. Included in his reading in 1893 were such books as, <u>The Commentary</u> of Dr. Parker of the City temple, Pearson's <u>Many Infallible Proofs</u> and Butler's <u>Analogy</u>. Section of these books was unintelligible to him. According to Gandhi:

"Many infallible proofs were proofs in support of the religion of the Bible as the author understood it; the book had no effect on me. Parker's <u>Commentary</u> was morally stimulating, but it could not be of any help to one who had no faith in the

M.K. Gandhi, My experiments op.cit.: 100.

M.K. Gandhi, My experiments op.cit.: 101-102.

prevalent Christian beliefs. Butler's <u>Analogy</u> stuck me as being a very profound and difficult book... The arguments advanced in it regarding the existence of God were unnecessary for me, as I had then passed the stage of unbelief; but the arguments in proof of Jesus being the only Incarnation of God and the Mediator between God and man left me unmoved".

Mr. Coates seemed to have had a great affection for Gandhi. Once he advised him to throw away the *Vishnava* necklace of *Tulasi*-beads, which he thought it to be superstition. Gandhi politely declined saying that it was a sacred gift from his mother.

Coates also introduced Gandhi to several friends whom he regarded as staunch Christians. One of them was a family, which belonged to the Plymouth Brethren, a Christian sect. One of the members of the Plymouth Brethren told Gandhi:

"You admit that we are all sinners. Now look at the perfection of our belief. Our attempts at improvement and atonement are futile. And yet redemption we must have. How can we bear the burden of Sin? We can but throw it on Jesus. He is the only sinless Son of God. It is his word that those who believe in him shall have everlasting life. Therein lies Gods infinite

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> C.F. Andrews, <u>Mahatma Gandhi His Life and Ideas</u> (New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 1987) 69.

mercy. And as we believe in the atonement of Jesus, our sins do not bind us. Sin we must. It is impossible to live in this world sinless. And therefore Jesus suffered and atoned for all the sins of mankind. Only he who accepts His great redemption can have eternal peace. Think of what a life of restlessness is yours, and what a promise of peace we have"<sup>19</sup>.

Gandhi was not impressed with that argument and he replied:

"If this be the Christianity acknowledged by all Christians, I cannot accept it. I do not seek redemption from the consequences of my sin. I seek to be redeemed from Sin itself, or rather from the very thought of sin. Until I have attained that end, I shall be content to be restless" <sup>20</sup>.

The Plymouth Brother argued: "I assure you, your attempt is fruitless. Think again over what I have said"<sup>21</sup>.

When Gandhi narrated the above incident to Mr. Coates he was worried but Gandhi assured him that the distorted belief of a Plymouth Brother could not prejudice him against Christianity<sup>22</sup>.

At the invitation of Baker Gandhi attended a revival convention in Wellington under the chairmanship of the well known saintly preacher

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> M.K. Gandhi, My experiments op.cit.: 103-104.

M.K. Gandhi, My experiments op.cit.: 104.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Rev. Andrew Murray. The convention, which lasted three days, did not in any way change his attitude towards Christianity. He only developed a liking for some of their hymns, which were very sweet. Mr. Baker's hope was that the fervent religious atmosphere and the devoutness of the people attending would inevitably lead Gandhi to embrace Christianity. But he gave an assurance to Mr. Baker, that nothing could prevent him from embracing Christianity, should he felt the call. So it was not a question of want of openness, but actually Gandhi saw no reason for changing his religion. He said:

"The pious lives of Christians did not give me anything that the lives of men of other faiths had failed to give. I had seen in other lives just the same reformation that I had heard of among Christians. Philosophically there was nothing extraordinary in Christian principles. From the point of view of sacrifice, it seemed to me that the Hindus greatly surpassed the Christians. It was impossible for me to regard Christianity as a perfect religion or the greatest of all religions"<sup>23</sup>.

Gandhi shared his difficulties with his Christian friends. But they gave him no satisfactory answers to his mental churning. Gandhi's difficulties lay elsewhere. They were with regard to the Bible and its accepted interpretation, particularly about the nature

of Christ and his redemption<sup>24</sup>. Moreover, it was a period when the Buddha with his universal compassion appealed to Gandhi more than Christ. At the instance of his Muslim friends he read the Koran. He was also in correspondence with some Christian friends like Mr. Edward Maitland who sent him the book The Perfect Way which he had co-authored with Anna Kingsford and also The New Interpretation of the Bible. Gandhi liked both because they seemed to support Hinduism. But the most appealing book was Tolstoy's The Kingdom of God is Within You.

There was a short period in Gandhi's life when he had seriously considered the option of accepting Christianity. But it was the timely guidance given by a remarkable person-a jeweller, a poet and a saint rolled into one-called Rajchandra (or Raychandbhai, as Gandhi called him) of Bombay who helped him to take a definite stand against conversion. He described Raichandbhai as one of the three moderns who had influenced him most, the other two being Tolstoy and Ruskin. Tolstoy's The Kingdom of God is Within You by exposing the contradiction of organised religions had helped Gandhi to defend himself against the proselytizing missionaries in South Africa, and Ruskin's Unto this Last had brought to him the value of a life of simplicity and the dignity of manual labour. But it was Raichandbhai who gave a sense of

Louis Fisher, <u>The Life of Mahatma Gandhi</u> (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1995)53-55.

direction to Gandhi's religious quest. Rajchandra insisted on the accord between belief and action. To him it was the way a man lived, not the recital of a verse or the form of prayer which made one a good Hindu, a good Muslim, or a good Christian. Rajchandra was himself a Jain, but he made Gandhi's faith in Hinduism deeper.

Rajchandra Gandhi's mentor gave detailed answers to twenty-seven questions put by him on religious, philosophical, and ethical subjects, some of them reflecting his struggles with the missionaries. Among these were, "What is God? Is he the creator of the universe? If a claim put forward that a particular religion is the best, may we not ask the claimant for proof? The Christians held that the Bible is divinely inspired and that Christ was an incarnation of God, being his son. Was He? Were all the Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in Christ" 25?

The gist of the advice given by Raychandbhai may be summed up as follows:

"Religion is not an 'ism'. It is not merely on intellectual knowledge of or belief in any set of doctrines. It is an innate attribute of the soul. It is that much enables us to define our duties in life as a human being and establish correct relationships with our fellows. But before this we have to

1990)76-77. CWMG Vol. 32: 4-13 & 593-602.

Judith Brown, Gandhi Prisoner of Hope (New Delhi: Oxford University Press,

have a knowledge of our own true nature. Religion is therefore the means in the first place to self realisation or realisation of the true nature of the self<sup>26</sup>.

From Raychandbhai Gandhi learnt that everybody could attain liberation by following his own religion. For liberation meant complete freedom from attachment and hatred and this was the common goal of all religions<sup>27</sup>.

When Gandhi settled in Durban Mr. Spencer Walton, the head of the South Africa General Mission sought him out. Gandhi developed a friendship with Mr. and Mrs. Walton. "This friendship kept alive my interest in religion"<sup>28</sup>, said Gandhi. He also came into contact with another Christian family at whose suggestion he attended the Wesleyan church every Sunday. Subsequently he wrote:

"The church did not make a favourable impression on me. The sermons seemed to me uninspiring. The congregation did not strike me as being particularly religious. They were not an assembly of devout souls; they appeared rather to be worldly-minded people, going to church for recreation and in conformity to custom. Here, at times, I would involuntarily

Pyarelal, <u>Mahatma Gandhi Vol.1 The Early Phase</u> (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1986) 329-330.

Pyarelal, <u>Mahatma Gandhi Vol.1 The Early Phase</u> (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1986) 331.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> M.K.Gandhi, My experiments op.cit.: 132.

doze. I was ashamed, but some of my neighbours, who were in no better case, lightened the shame. I could not go on long like this, and soon gave up attending the service".

Another Christian friend of Gandhi was Rev. Joseph J. Doke, a Baptist minister from Scotland who subsequently became Gandhi's first biographer. They met in Johannesburg. Rev. Doke, as ardent sympathiser of Gandhi's passive resistance movement, greatly assisted him. Gandhi always recognised in him his ideal of what a Christian ought to be<sup>30</sup>. To Gandhi true religion was more a matter of heart than of the intellect, and genuine beliefs were those which were literally lived. Doke discussed with Gandhi his religious convictions and developed a very deep understanding about Gandhi's religious perception. Doke made this revealing assessment about Gandhi's religious views: "...they are too closely allied to Christianity to be entirely Hindu; and too deeply saturated with Hinduism to be called Christian, while his sympathies are so wide and catholic that one could imagine he has reached the point where the formulae of sects are meaningless" <sup>31</sup>.

Rev. C.F Andrews was another important Christian Gandhi met in South Africa. They developed a lasting friendship. As Margaret Chatterjee has observed: "It was not probably until he met C.F.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.: 133.

<sup>31</sup> Joseph J Doke, op.cit.: 142 - 143.

C.F. Andrews, Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas op.cit.: 77.

Andrews that he came close to a Christian fellow seeker for whom religious aspiration was endless striving, and endless quest, as agonising as Gandhi himself had found it to be"<sup>32</sup>. Andrews in particular became Gandhi's model of Christian ministry, and when asked how missionaries could best serve the Indian masses. Gandhi replied, 'Copy Charlie Andrews'<sup>33</sup>.

Such was the remarkable friendship Gandhi had established with some missionaries in South Africa whose admiration and influence of each upon the other was mutual.

# 6.4 Gandhi's response to missionaries

The intense encounter with South African missionaries left lasting impressions on Gandhi. Generally, he was repelled by the narrow exclusiveness of the missionary viewpoint, which denied validity to Hinduism and other religions and also by the claim of Christianity that God was accessible only through Jesus. Though he found much in Christianity and Christ that was commendable, time and again he reported that this exclusive claim stood in the way of his acceptance of their practices. "It was more than I could believe that Jesus was the only incarnate Son of God, and that only he who believed in Him, would have everlasting life"<sup>34</sup>. Commenting on the

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Margaret Chatterjee, op.cit.: 132.

M.K. Gandhi, <u>Christian Missions</u> op.cit.: 35.

M.K. Gandhi, My experiments op.cit.: 113.

father-son relationship of God and Jesus and on the martyrdom of Jesus Gandhi wrote:

"If God could have sons, all of us were his sons. If Jesus was like God, or God Himself, then all men were like God and could be God Himself. My reason was not ready to believe literally that Jesus by his death and by his blood redeemed the sins of the world. Metaphorically there might be some truth in it. Again, according to Christianity, only human beings had souls, not other living beings, for whom death, meant compete extinction; while I held a contrary belief. I could accept Jesus as a martyr, an embodiment of sacrifice, and a divine teacher, but not as the most perfect man ever born. His death on the cross was a great example to the world, but that there was anything like a mysterious or miraculous virtue in it my heart, could not accept" 35.

In spite of these differences he admired the earnestness, dedication and devotion to work of his Christian missionary friends. These people loved me so well; he told his biographer Joseph Doke, "that if it would have influenced me to become Christian, they could have become vegetarians themselves".

M.K. Gandhi, My experiments op.cit.: 113.

Joseph J. Doke op. cit.: 58.

#### 6.5 Contact with ECU

Gandhi continued his explorations in Christianity. He wrote to Edward Maitland the founder of the (ECU) Esoteric Christian Union. Maitland sent Gandhi two books-The New Interpretation of the Bible and The Perfect Way or the finding of Christ. Gandhi said, "I greatly liked Maitland's books. They seemed to support Hinduism"<sup>37</sup>. Commenting on the impact of Maitland's views on Gandhi Pyarelal wrote that at a time when, in the absence of a complete guide to initiate him into his own religion, he was feeling lost, Maitland's writings gave him a reasoned presentation of some of the basic tenets of Hinduism like the doctrine of Rebirth, Transmigration, essential identity of God and the individual soul and salvation from the possibility of a fall by the realisation of the supreme. Later he applied Maitland's method of allegorical interpretation of the Gospel to the Indian Epics-the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and the Gita which he insisted, should be regarded not as historical works but philosophical poems presented in a historical setting. He was very much taken up, too, by Maitland's insistence on reasoned faith and later declared that while faith transcends reason, it must not contradict, reason<sup>38</sup>.

# 6.6 Influence of Leo Tolstoy

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Pyarelal, op.cit.: 324.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

It was towards the close of his stay at Pretoria that Gandhi came under the influence of Count Leo Tolstoy, the Russian sage, philosopher and man of letters. Gandhi admitted that, Tolstoy's <u>The Kingdom of God is Within You</u> overwhelmed him. It left an abiding impression on him. He said: "Its reading cured me of my scepticism and made me a firm believer in Ahimsa". Pyarelal later described <u>The Kingdom of God is Within You</u> as an almost complete manual of the theory and practice of non-violence as an instrument of social change <sup>40</sup> and when Gandhi launched his passive resistance he often cited Tolstoy, and carried this book with him to prison.

Tolstoy's ideas that impressed Gandhi can be summarised as follows. What the organised church professed and propagated was not only a lie but an immoral deception. The Church as a body of man laying claim to the exclusive possession of truth was the chief obstacle to Christ's teaching being understood by the people. The organised Church was alienated from the doctrine of Christ who insisted upon love towards our neighbour and non-resistance to evil. The contention of the Church that its teachings were based on revelation was above the scrutiny of reason. God had revealed the truth in the souls of men so that men might be guided by it. Miracles had evidently been introduced into the narrative of the Apostles in order to strengthen the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> CWMG Vol.37: 268.

Quoted in Joseph Thekkinedath, <u>Love of Neighbour in Mahatma Gandhi</u> (Alwaye: Pontifical Institute of Theology & Philosophy,1973) 28-30.

faith of the people<sup>41</sup>. Tolstoy went on: "Christ I regard as a man like all of us, to regard him as God is to renounce God"<sup>42</sup>. Further he said that, outwardly regarded, religions presented an endless variety but they are all alike in their fundamental principles. These principles basic to all religions constitute the true religion<sup>43</sup>.

The first principles common to all religions, Universal Religion or simply Religion as Tolstoy called it were that; "there is a God, the cause of causes, the origin of all things; that in man's hearts dwells a spark from the divine origin which man could by his way of living increase or decrease; that to increase the divine spark man must suppress his passions and increase love in himself; and that the practical means to attain this result was to do to others as you would they should do to you"<sup>44</sup>. Tolstoy with his belief in the fundamental unity of all religions opposed proselytization and authoritarianism. Religion being a matter of personal experience, it could grow from within only as a result of ones own efforts <sup>45</sup>. The final conclusion he reached was that all that was necessary for a man was to strive with all his might to overcome his passions and unreservedly to surrender himself to the spirit of love. Love would then unerringly show the way <sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Pyarelal, op.cit.: 658.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Ibid.: 656.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Pyarelal, op.cit.: 663.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.: 667.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> Ibid.: 672.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

Tolstoy questioned and rejected the conventional Christian propagation that people were corrupted by sin to the extent that they were unable to save themselves or to know the truth. Instead he taught that Jesus showed and demonstrated the ideal of inward perfection, truth and love, which was attainable by all people. According to Tolstoy:

"All are attracted by this ideal, and it is not necessary to become perfect in its practice, but to make progress in that direction. The fulfilment of the teaching consists in progress along the appointed path towards inward perfection by an imitation of Christ, and towards outward perfection by the establishment of the kingdom of God. Mans greater or lesser blessedness according to this teaching depends not on the degree of perfection he has attained but on the progress he is making. Complete perfection will never be attained but the striving towards full and infinite perfection will constantly increase the good in men"<sup>47</sup>.

For Tolstoy, Christ was not a divine saviour atoning for the sins of mankind and offering eternal life, but a teacher and moral example, the core of whose teaching lay in the five commandments of the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Pyarelal, op.cit.: 682-695.

Sermon on the Mount: Do not anger, Do not lust, Do not take oaths, Do not go to law, Do not fight  $^{48}$ .

Tolstoy in his correspondence with Gandhi testified that, the whole Christian civilisation, so brilliant in it's exterior, has grown up on support of war, legalised state violence and justified injustice in the name of Christianity. This is a flagrant and strange contradiction of Christianity. Tolstoy continued to say that the life of the Christian people was an absolute contradiction between their profession and the basis of their life, contradiction between love recognised as the law of life and violence recognised as inevitable in different departments of life<sup>49</sup>.

Much of Tolstoy's philosophy was clearly compatible with Hinduism, especially the emphasis on inward growth and practice of non-violence as an instrument of social change. At the same time he identified the moral core of Christianity as the law of love and explicated its personal and social consequences. Gandhi felt at home in it, and found it a powerful weapon for overcoming the limitations of a narrow and dogmatic form of Christianity.

Gandhi's correspondence with his well-wishers and their timely advice helped him to resolve his doubts about his ancestral faith and reconcile the Bible with Hinduism. Tolstoy introduced him to the

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Christian Bartoff, ed. <u>Letter to a Hindoo</u> (Berlin: Gandhi Information Centre, 1997) 63.

powerful interpretation of the moral core of Christianity. The following statement of Gandhi infact summed up his encounter with the Christian evangelical friends. "Though I took a path my Christian friends had not intended for me, I have remained for ever indebted to them for the religious quest that they awakened in me. I shall always cherish the memory of their contact"<sup>50</sup>.

# 6.7 The final phase

Mahatma Gandhi arrived in India from South Africa in 1915. The question of personal conversion to Christianity was no longer there. But he had written and spoken profusely on the missionary question during these years. His emergence on the political horizon of India in 1919 also marked his entry into the missionary horizon too which was a fact and force to reckon with in Indian political life. His message contained a clear call to a new thinking on the whole missionary question.

The period between 1915 and 1948 was a momentous one in the history of the world in general and of India in particular. It spanned the time of the two great wars. India was passing through successive campaigns and crises. It was the period of three decades of Gandhi's untiring efforts to keep together a nation of warring groups political, religious, and ethnic etc. In the history of missions too this was a significant period, when missionary encyclicals were written,

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M.K. Gandhi, My experiments op.cit.: 115.

conferences held, a new missionary consciousness roused and a wave of new missionary activities and expansion set in motion.

Though Gandhi did not make a planned and systematic study of Christianity, he had learned a great deal about it through genuine study and involvement with Christians. Gandhi developed personal contacts with Indian Christians and missionaries in India and abroad also. Gandhi drew on his own personal knowledge and experience of religion, on the contemporary happenings in the political, religious and missionary world and wrote and spoke at length on various issues related to them. The spirit in which his words were addressed my be gathered from his own confession to a group of missionaries in Bangalore in August 1927. Gandhi opened the discussion by claiming to be a friend of the missionaries ever since his close contact with them in South Africa. He said: "Though I have been a friend, I have always been a critic, not from any desire to be critical, but because I have felt that I would be a better friend if I opened out my heart, even at the risk of wounding their feelings. They never allowed me to think that they felt hurt; they certainly never resented my criticism",<sup>51</sup>. He asked missionaries to reread the message of the Bible in terms of what is happening around them. In the conference he also asked them to make the Hindus better Hindus, and request them to see to it that even if a person became a Christian he should not be torn from his surrounding.

M.K. Gandhi, <u>Christian Missions</u> op.cit.: 99.

India witnessed Hindu-Muslim riots in Malabar, Delhi, Aligarh, Allahabad, Multan, and Calcutta in the early 1920s. There were also forcible conversion and reconversion on either side. The Suddhi movement of Swami Shraddhananda and the Hindu Mahasabha came into prominence. Each side's concern for number and membership was instilled by political motive as well. The country was being politically and socially divided. The entrance of missionary societies into to the forces of division rather than healing it. The the fray added evangelistic spirit that missionaries of the twenties brought to bear on non-Christian population had the touch of aggressive cultural imperialism. During that period, everything except one's own denomination was looked upon as error. The Old Testament prophetical fulminations against non-Jewish faith had some how continued in the Christian Churches. Indological studies had indeed made headway in Western University circles, but missionary circles with their fundamentalist outlook had not yet been influenced by them. The missionary attitude to Hinduism of the mid twenties could be read from the following:

"The natives hanker after these false forms of religion and make almost any worthless object their god. The very cow is adhered as a god; snakes, monkeys and rats have temples built in their honour; even cold rough rocks receive homage from this poor people. For centuries the vast majority of Hindus have thus been offering their prayers to these fictitious gods

without receiving even the semblance of succour in the vicissitudes of life. They knew not the strong living God of Christianity, and the increase of this saving religion is greatly retarded by inborn prejudice and hatred of Hinduism ... Adults are seldom won over to Christianity and when won, years of instruction are necessary to eradicate false beliefs and to imbue them with spirit of Christ"<sup>52</sup>.

## 6.8 Encounter with Christian missions

During the first few years of his stay in India, Gandhi was mostly observing and scrutinising the work of the Christian missions against the background of the country's tradition and the contemporary conditions. He participated in a few missionary assemblies and gave his comments about the missionary projects. Special reference must be made to the speech he delivered at a missionary conference in Madras on February 14, 1916. There Gandhi defined *Swadeshi* in religion as the spirit which restricts one to ones' own ancestral religion<sup>53</sup>. Gandhi's view was that if ones religion is defective one should serve it by purging it of its defects. Gandhi continued to say that, as one who had endeavoured to study the Bible and as one who had came under the influence of noted missionaries and enjoyed the friendship of some of them it was his duty to suggest in all humility and sincerity that the missionary bodies in India would serve the spirit of Christianity better

Ignatius Jesudasan, "Gandhian Perspectives on Missiology", <u>ICHR</u> Vol.IV, No.1 April (1970): 54.

by dropping the goal of proselytizing while continuing their philanthropic work<sup>54</sup>? He offered the above suggestion not as a biased Hindu, but as a humble and impartial student of religion with great leaning towards Christianity<sup>55</sup>. Gandhi went on to ask, whether the message 'Go ye unto all the world' had not been some what narrowly interpreted and the spirit of it missed? And Gandhi gave the following reasons against proselytizing and conversion from one religion to another. (i) lack of sincerity and genuineness (ii) the appeal was made to the stomach instead of genuine spiritual change in many cases (iii) conversion would create rift in family circles and give rise to conflicts. (iv) salvation was attainable in one's own religion.

At the same conference Gandhi also referred to the absorbing nature of Hinduism and to the debt India owed to the missionaries for their philanthropic work. He said he could talk to them with more authority as he had read the Bible well and considered it part of his scriptures. Gandhi repeated this and asked them to withdraw from the goal of proselytizing but to continue their philanthropic work<sup>56</sup>?

Gandhi suggested to the missionaries that they should move about 'with their lives in their hands', serving the people of India in a truly missionary spirit whatever might be the failure or harassment

<sup>53</sup> C.F.Andrews, <u>Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas</u> op.cit.:120.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> C.F. Andrews, <u>Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas</u> op.cit.: 121.

Anand T. Hingorani, ed. <u>The Message of Jesus Christ</u> (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1986)18.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> CWMG Vol. 13: 220.

they might face. "If you would breathe life into those poor people, embrace the programme which I have been placing before every Indian today and enter their lives along with it. Through no other work can you fulfil the command of Jesus as you can through this"<sup>57</sup>. Later responding to Bishop Reginald Heber's observation about India viz., "where every prospect pleases and only man is vile", Gandhi said that it was wrong for missionaries to come to India thinking that they were coming to a land of heathens of idolatrous and of men who did not know God<sup>58</sup>?

In February 1926, when a well-wisher asked Gandhi: "how many leper asylums and institutions for the depressed and the distressed have missionaries established? How many have you"? Gandhi replied: "I must own that missionaries have founded many leper asylums and the like ... But even such noble service loses its nobility when conversion is the motive behind it. That service is the noblest which is rendered for its own sake"<sup>59</sup>. Again in an interview to Francis G. Hickman Gandhi said: "you send them (missionaries) here for nothing, but that also is part of imperialist exploitation. For they would like to make us like you, better buyers of your goods, and unable to do without your cars and luxuries. So the Christianity that you send us is adulterated. If you establish schools, colleges and hospitals without the object of adding to the number of the so-called

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> <u>CWMG</u> Vol. 27 : 206.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> Ibid.: 436.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> Ibid.: 203.

Christian population, your philanthropy would be untainted"<sup>60</sup>. On another occasion he told a student who asked him about the contribution of Christianity and Christian missionaries to India:

"In my opinion Christian missionary have done good to us indirectly. Their direct contribution is probably more harmful than otherwise. I am against the modern method of proselytizing. Years of experience of proselytizing both in South Africa and India has convinced me that it has not raised the general moral tone of the converts who have imbibed the superficialities of European civilization, and have missed the teaching of Jesus. I must be understood to refer to the general tendency and not to the brilliant exceptions" 61.

Gandhi reminded the missionaries that they could not give without taking. If their intention was to give the rich treasures of their experience, then they should open their hearts out to receive the treasures of this land. He wrote: "... do not preach the God of history, but show him as he lives today through you. It is better to allow our lives to speak for us than our words. C.F. Andrews never preaches. He is incessantly doing his work" 62.

In an interview Gandhi opined: "In Hindu households the advent of a missionary has meant the disruption of the family, coming

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> CWMG Vol. 73: 29.

<sup>61</sup> CWMG Vol. 29: 326.

<sup>62 &</sup>lt;u>CWMG</u> Vol. 29 : 261-262. EMPHASIS ADDED

in the wake of change of dress, manners, language, food and drink"<sup>63</sup>. When the interviewer pointed out that this was an old conception and no such thing was associated with proselytizing, Gandhi admitted the outward condition might have changed but the inward, a vilification of Hindu religion, though subdued, was still there. Talking to an Indian Christian missionary Gandhi said: "Not unless you isolate the proselytizing aspect from your educational and medical institutions are they worth anything? Why should not your service be its own reward"<sup>64</sup>. Nevertheless whenever there was an opportunity, Gandhi never failed to come out with his opposition to conversion. In his reply to a question by A.A. Paul the Federation of International Fellowships, Gandhi said categorically:

"It is a conviction growing daily upon me that the great and rich Christian missions will render true service to India if they can persuade themselves to confine their activities to humanitarian service without ulterior motive of converting India or at least her unsophisticated villagers to Christianity, and destroying their social superstructure, which not withstanding its many defects, has stood now, from time immemorial, the onslaughts upon it from within and from without. Whether they-the missionaries and we-wish it or not what is true in Hindu faith will abide what is untrue will fall

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<sup>&</sup>lt;u>CWMG</u> Vol.61: 46.

<sup>64 &</sup>lt;u>CWMG</u> Vol.65 : 80.

to pieces. Every living faith must have within itself the power of rejuvenation if it is to live"<sup>65</sup>.

Dr. Chesterman, the medical secretary of the English Baptist Mission, met Gandhi at Sevagram on February 14, 1939 and asked him whether Gandhi had any objection to conversion applied to areas like Kond Hills where the aboriginal were animists. Gandhi told him:

"...yes. It does apply, because I know that in spite of being described as animist, these tribes have from time immemorial been absorbed into Hinduism. They are, like indigenous medicine, of the soil, and their roots lie deep there".

Dr. John Mott, interviewing Gandhi, raised the issue of mass conversion of Harijans' to Christianity and said Christians would be of great help to Gandhi in this connection (removal of untouchability). The Rev. Whitehead, Bishop of the Church of England Mission, made some provocative statements about the effect of Christian mass movement in ameliorating the condition of the untouchables in the Madras Presidency. Responding to them Gandhi said emphatically: "I distrust mass movements of this nature. They have, as their object, not the upliftment of the untouchables but their ultimate conversion. This motive of mass proselytization lurking at the back in my opinion vitiates missionary effort" 67. He had also said that as majority of the

M.K. Gandhi, Christian Missions op.cit.: 227.

67 CWMG Vol. 40:59.

<sup>65</sup> CWMG Vol.61 : 457-58.

Harijans cannot understand the presentation Christianity it would be a travesty of religion to seek to uproot from the Harijans' simple minds such faith as they had in their ancestral religion and to transfer their allegiance to another.<sup>68</sup>

Dr. Mott replied that there was conflicting opinion on this. There were some who seriously believed that the untouchables would be better off if they became Christians from conviction and that it would transform their lives for the better. To this, Gandhi answered:

"I am sorry I have been unable to discover any tangible evidence to confirm this view. I was once taken to a Christian village. Instead of meeting among the converts with that frankness which one associated with a spiritual transformation, I found an air of evasiveness about them. They were afraid to talk. This struck me as a change not for the better but for the worse".

Gandhi's close associate Andrews also had discussed the question of mass conversion with Gandhi. He wanted to know Gandhi's reaction to missionaries indulging mass conversion of Harijans. Gandhi told him:

"Their behaviour has been as bad as that of the rest who are in the field to add to their number. What pains one is their

M.K. Gandhi, Christian Missions op.cit. : 59.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> Ibid.: 60.

frantic attempt to exploit the weakness of Harijans. If they said, 'Hinduism is a diabolical religion and you came to us', I should understand. But they dangle earthy paradise in front of them and make promises to them, which they can never keep. When in Bangalore, a deputation of Indian Christians came to me, with a number of resolutions, which they thought would please me, I said to them; This is not a matter for bargain. You must say definitely that this is a matter to be settled by the Hindus themselves. Where is the sense of talking of a spiritual sudden awakening of hunger among untouchables and then trying to exploit a particular- situation? The poor Harijans have no mind, intelligence, no sense of difference between God and no God. It is absurd for a single individual to talk of taking all the Harijans with himself. Are they all bricks that they can be moved from one structure to another",70.

On January 19, 1937 an interview was arranged with Bishop Moore, Bishop Abraham and some other Christian friends at Kottayam. The object of the interview was to clear the misunderstanding created over Gandhi's writings in criticism to the CMS appeal for funds for conversion of depressed classes. Gandhi said that he could not understand how responsible Christians could make extravagant statement to the effect that thousands had experienced a

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> CWMG Vol. 64 : 18.

spiritual awakening and accepted the Gospel. Gandhi said that he could have no objection to responding to spiritual hunger provided it was genuinely felt and expressed<sup>71</sup>.

In March 1940 at Sevagram a missionary asked Gandhi what one should avoid while presenting the Gospel of Christ, Gandhi answered:

"Cease to think that you want to convert the whole world to your interpretation of Christianity. At the end of reading the Bible let me tell you it did not leave on my mind the impression that Jesus ever meant Christians to do what the bulk of those who take his name do. The moment you adopt the attitude, I suggest the field of service becomes limitless. You limit your own capacity by thinking and saying that you must proselytise".

This statement, infact, summaries Gandhi's position.

## 6.9 On the place of missions in Independent India

Gandhi was often asked if he would favour the retention of American and other foreign missionaries when India secured selfgovernment. His answer was: "If instead of confining themselves purely to humanitarian work and material service to the poor, they do proselytizing by means of medical aid, education etc., then I would

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> M.K. Gandhi, <u>Christian Missions</u> op.cit.: 155-157.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> CWMG Vol. 71: 320-321.

certainly ask them to withdraw. Every nation's religions are adequate for her people. We need no converting spiritually"<sup>73</sup>. Later in reply to a letter to James P. Rutnam of Ceylon Gandhi wrote:

"The missionaries know that in spite of my out spoken criticism of their methods, they have in India and among the non-Christians no warmer friend than I. In India under *Swaraj* I have no doubt that foreign missionaries will be at liberty to do their proselytizing, as I would say, in the wrong way; but they would be expected to bear with those who, like me, may point out that in their opinion the way is wrong"<sup>74</sup>.

During his visit to London in 1931 to attend the Round table conference he addressed a meeting of the missionary societies in Great Britain and Ireland. In his address Gandhi clarified that he never had said that Christian missionaries would be prevented from preaching in free India. He acknowledged Christian influence on him and attributed his fierce hatred of child marriage and untouchability to Christian influence. He also acknowledged many splendid specimens of Christian missionaries. But he went on to remind them that; religion was like rose. It threw out the scent that attracted people like a magnet and they were drawn to it involuntarily...<sup>75</sup>. But he reiterated his opposition to conversion.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> CWMG Vol. 45 : 320.

 $<sup>\</sup>overline{\text{CWMG}}$  Vol. 46 : 110.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> CWMG Vol. 48: 121.

Subsequently, some American teachers asked Gandhi about the place of Christian missionaries in the New India being built, and what they could do to help in that great task. Gandhi answered:

"My personal view, therefore, is that if you feel that India's religions too are true, though like all religions imperfect for having percolated through imperfect human agency, and you come as fellow-helpers and fellow-seekers, there is place for you here. But if you came as preachers of the 'true gospel' to a people who are wandering in darkness, so far as I am concerned, you have no place. You may impose yourselves upon us"<sup>76</sup>.

When the missionaries expressed their apprehension as to whether they would be allowed to continue with their proselytizing activity, Gandhi replied that they would enjoy all the freedom they would be entitled to under the law of the land <sup>77</sup>.

# 6.10 State and religion

While discussing with Rev. John Kellas, Principal of Scottish Church College Calcutta the relation between education, religion and the state Gandhi said:

> "The state should undoubtedly be secular... Every one living in it should be entitled to profess his religion without let or hindrance. So long as the citizen obeyed the common law of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> <u>CWMG</u> Vol. 68 : 252.

the land, there should be no interference with missionary effort but no mission could enjoy the patronage of the state as it did during the foreign regime"<sup>78</sup>.

Commenting on the Government proposal to stop grants to Christian Churches, and the flow of money from America and England for missionary work Gandhi wrote:

"It is feared that 75% of the churches in India will have to be closed down. But religion does not prosper with the help of money...They do not really need assistance from Government or anyone. They should follow the teachings of their religion. If they persevere in that path of sacrifice shown by Christ, no one can take their religion away from them" 79.

Gandhi said that he had ample evidence with him of missionaries visiting famine area with money in their pocket, distributing it among the famine-stricken, converting them to their fold, taking charge of their temple and demolishing it to build a church. The aim, it appeared, was to uproot Hinduism from the very foundation and replace it by another faith. "It is like an attempt to destroy a house which though badly in want of repair appears to the dweller quite decent and habitable" he remarked. Gandhi clarified

<sup>77</sup> CWMG Vol. 71: 79.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> CWMG Vol. 89 :51.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> CWMG Vol. 90 : 293-294.

<sup>80</sup> M.K. Gandhi, Christian Missions op.cit.: 60.

that he would welcome those missionaries who could show him how to repair it and even offered to do so themselves.

When John Mott in one dialogue with Gandhi insisted on the liberty "to preach and teach", Gandhi held that preaching and teaching should best be done through one's life, which alone should be allowed to speak<sup>81</sup>. Gandhi viewed that missionaries should not take an undue advantage of people's disabilities<sup>82</sup>.

Even at the risk of facing the charge of repetition, Gandhi brought in the analogy of the rose. "If the rose needs no agent much less does the Gospel of Christ need any agent", 83 he declared. This was to be the model for a true representative of Christianity, according to Gandhi.

This almost summarised Gandhi's views on Christian missionaries. He was certainly against the use of schools, hospitals and like for the purpose of conversion. He viewed it as an unhealthy method and that give rise to bitter resentment. Conversion was a matter of the heart and must depend upon silent influence of pure character and conduct of missionaries. True conversion came imperceptibly like the aroma of a rose. Gandhi was not against conversion as such but

Bharatan Kumarappa, ed. <u>The Removal of Untouchability</u> by M.K. Gandhi (Ahmedabad: Navajiyan, 1959) 131-135.

<sup>82 &</sup>lt;u>CWMG</u> Vol. 68 : 167.

<sup>83</sup> CWMG Vol. 65:81.

certainly against present methods by missionaries. Conversion must not be reduced to business depending on money. Gandhi also held that all religions were of equal merit to respective nations or individual professing them. India was in no need of conversion of the type adopted by the missionaries. Whilst under Swaraj Gandhi held that all would be free to exercise their own faiths. His constant advice in most of the encounters with Christian missions was that if they should refrain from merely 'telling' India about Christ and Christianity and had lived the life enjoined upon them by the Sermon on the Mount, India, instead of suspecting them, would have appreciated their living in the midst of her children and directly profited by their presence.

## 6.11 Gandhi's attitude towards Indian Christian community

As stated above Gandhi was critical of Christian missions and missionaries. He was critical of the role of the Indian Christians also. He admonished them for their erroneous view about Hinduism and challenged them to be rooted in their own heritage and traditions and become active participants in national reconstruction.

He had a message for Indian Christians. He desired that the Indian Christianity should not be synonymous with denationalisation and Europeanization<sup>84</sup>. In his speech at the Bengal Christian Conference on August 29, 1925 at Calcutta (which was presided over by J. K. Banarjee son of late K.C. Banarjee) Gandhi referred to the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>84</sup> M.K. Gandhi, <u>Christian Missions</u> op.cit.: 101.

deplorable 'condition' of Indian Christians for their mixing Christianity with European mode and methods. Similarly, he had shown that Christianity should not mean denationalisation. He went on to say that Christianity must be a better expression of nationalism so that they should be prepared to die for the nation. In his opinion Christianity must not be repugnant to nationalism. It must been a greater dedication of their lives to the country's cause and for that they must enter into the hearts of the masses. He had heard many Christians say that they had nothing to do with the masses of India. He thought no religionist could say so since all of them were imperfect in some sense or the other. Gandhi requested the Indian Christians to dispel such ideas from their mind<sup>85</sup>. Expatiating this point of view Gandhi wrote:

"Conversion must not mean denationalisation. 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 greater dedication to one's country, greater surrender to God, greater self purification".

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<sup>85 &</sup>lt;u>CWMG</u> Vol. 28 : 133-134.

Anand T. Hingorani, <u>The Message</u>: 16. Stanley Jones seemed to agree with Gandhi on this for he said, Our converts were too often denationalised, identifying Christianity with Westernism. E. Stanley Jones, <u>Mahatma Gandhi An Interpretation</u> (Lucknow: Lucknow Publishing House, 1991) 84.

In another context he said: "It is a great pity; that Christianity should be mixed up with foreign dress and foreign ways of eating and drinking" He asked whether it was not truly deplorable that many Christian Indians discarded their own mother-tongue and brought up their Children only to speak English He advised the Indian Christians:

"Don't be dazzled by the splender that, comes to you from the west. Do not be thrown off your feet by this passing show ... so be not lifted off your feet, do not be drawn away from the simplicity of your ancestors" 89.

Gandhi found fault with the CLS, for not projecting a correct image of Indian culture to Indian Christians through their publications. In his letter to Rev. Alwood of Calcutta he wrote:

"I wonder if you know that the CLS continue to sell the utterly unbalanced views and opinions of Mr. Murdoch and others. And if you only knew the literature in the vernacular that is distributed through tens of thousands of leaflets and booklets, you will perhaps appreciate the force of my remarks. These things hurt me only because I knew that they believe the teachings of Jesus, in whose name they are said

<sup>87</sup> M.K.Gandhi, Christian Missions op.cit.: 95.

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89 Ibid.: 119-120.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.: 68-69.

and written; and it hurts me also because Indian Christians are fed upon such ignorance which they, in their simplicity imbibe as God's truth, and hence to hate those who were once their friends, companions and relatives" <sup>90</sup>.

Many Christian friends considered other faiths as false or so adulterated as to amount to falsity. Gandhi said Christians shut their eyes to the truth that shone in the other faiths and which gave equal joy and peace to their votaries. And he added: "I have not hesitated, therefore, to recommend to my Christian friends a prayerful and sympathetic study of other scriptures of the world. I can give my humble testimony that whilst such study has enabled me to give the same respect to them that I give to my own, it has enriched my own faith and broadened my vision" Gandhi's appeal to Christians was for the broadest toleration. He did not expect India to develop one religion, i.e. to be wholly Hindu or wholly Christian or wholly Mussalman, but he wanted it to be wholly tolerant, with all its religions working side by side with one another <sup>92</sup>.

In short, Gandhi's message to the Indian Christian community included a call for a true Christian living, giving up of western Christianity which Jesus himself would disown and the cultivation of a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>90</sup> CWMG Vol. 28 : 2.

Anand T. Hingorani, <u>The Message</u> op.cit.: 64.

<sup>92</sup> CWMG Vol. 64:397-402 & CWMG Vol.46:109.

sympathetic and broader approach to Indian religions. The proper approach of Christians to Hinduism should be to accept the good things that Hinduism could offer.

Gandhi believed that, no single religion can make an exclusive claim to truth. Therefore Gandhi called for religious toleration and mutual respect. His call to Indian Christians was to live Jesus' message in their lives and try to be true citizens of India and play an active role in nation building endeavours.

### 6.12 Gandhi's views on religious conversion: A deeper probe

As stated before Gandhi had repeatedly expressed his strong opposition to proselytizing and conversion from one religion to another. Changing one's religion according to him, will create problems for oneself and others. It would uproot one from his/her cultural milieu, traditional way of life, inborn patterns of behaviour and from one's kith and kin. He believed that mere changing of religion, taking new names, changing dress and pattern of social behaviour will not make a person a better human being nor will these bring him/her nearer to God or put him/her in the way of perfection. He, however, firmly believed that everybody stood in dire need of inner conversion and purification. Every seeker after truth had to constantly endeavour for self-purification and to reach the goal of God-realisation. He pleaded for humility. No one should undermine another's faith. "We should only pray", he wrote, "if we are Hindus,

not that a Christian should become a Hindu, or if we are Mussalmans, not that a Hindu or a Christian should become a Mussalman, nor should we even secretly pray that anyone should be converted, but our inmost prayer should be that a Hindu should be a better Hindu, a Muslim a better Muslim and a Christian a better Christian"<sup>93</sup>. This for Gandhi was the real conversion and not changing one's religion and labelling it as conversion. He told the Missionaries that India's religions were adequate for her people. We need no converting spirituality<sup>94</sup>.

What is to be emphasised is that Gandhi's opposition to proselytization was not confined to Christianity alone. It extended to Islam and Hinduism as well. While he was in South Africa he had advised the Arya Samaj against undertaking any conversion activity in his Ashrams. When his English disciple Miss. Slade (Mira Behn) expressed her desire to become a Hindu Gandhi's reply was that she should live in her faith, Christianity. By becoming a Hindu she would not in any way raise her moral stature. When the changing of the name of Miss. Slade to Mira Behn gave rise to controversy Gandhi explained that she was given not a Hindu but an Indian name and that this was done at her instance and for her convenience <sup>95</sup>. Similarly Richard Gregg, who wrote extensively on non-violence and stayed in

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>93</sup> CWMG Vol. 35: 461.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>94</sup> <u>CWMG</u> Vol. 46 : 27.

B.R. Nanda, <u>Gandhi and Religion</u> (New Delhi: Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti, 1990)13.

Gandhi's Ashram was called Govind. But he never became a Hindu. On the religious atmosphere of the Ashram Gandhi wrote:

"We have in the Ashram today several faiths represented. No proselytizing is practiced or permitted. We recognize all these faiths are true and divinely inspired, and all have suffered through the necessarily imperfect handling of imperfect men".

As Gandhi believed in and advocated equality of religions he insisted that no religion can claim superiority over others and that what was needed was toleration and mutual respect. Mere tolerance is not enough because it may imply an assumption of the inferiority of other faiths to one's own<sup>97</sup>. Once while talking to Andrews Gandhi made it clear: "My position is that all the great religions are fundamentally equal. We must have the innate respect for other religions as we have for our own. Mind you, not mutual toleration but equal respect." According to Gandhi, this attitude towards other religions would help us to assimilate what was good in them. All faiths constituted a revelation of truth, but all were imperfect and liable to error. "Reverence for other faiths need not blind us to their faults. We must be keenly alive to the defects of our own faiths also, yet not leave it on

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>96</sup> <u>CWMG</u> Vol. 42 : 488.

M. K. Gandhi, <u>From Yeravda Mandir</u> (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1959) 25.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>98</sup> CWMG Vol.64:20.

that account ,but try to overcome those defects. Looking at all religions with an equal eye, we would not only not hesitate, but would think it our duty, to blend into our faith every acceptable feature of other faiths"<sup>99</sup>, he explained.

This equal respect for other religions, said Gandhi, was our duty because our own religion was imperfect as others. The peculiar situation of multi-religiosity of India where Hindus, Muslims, Christians etc. live together also demanded so. Gandhi wrote:

"The need of the moment is not one religion but mutual respect and tolerance of the devotees of different religions. We want to reach not the dead level, but unity in diversity. Any attempt to root out traditions, effects of heredity, climate and other surroundings is not only bound to fail but is a sacrilege. The soul of religions is one, but it is encased in a multitude of forms. The latter will persist to the end of the time. Wise man will ignore the outward crust and see the same soul living under a variety of crusts. For Hindus to expect Islam, Christianity or Zoroastrianism to be driven out of India is as idle a dream as it would be for Mussalmans to have only Islam of their imagination rule the world. But if belief in one God and the race of HIS prophet in a neverending chain is sufficient for Islam then we are all

<sup>99</sup> M.K.Gandhi, From Yeravda Mandir op.cit.: 26.

Mussalmans, but we are also all Hindus and Christians. Truth is the exclusive prosperity of no single scripture" <sup>100</sup>.

The method suggested by Gandhi for practising one's faith in a pluralistic situation as existing in India was, infact a challenge to Christian missions.

As mentioned earlier, Gandhi's position on conversion was derived from his faith in equality of religions (Sarvadharma Samabhava). Gandhi elaborated this idea in his letters to ashramites written from Yeravda central prison, where he commented on the vows and their observances. Equality of religions meant that all of them were willed by God, they are all based on common fundamentals and test of it being the evident sanctity of great saints it produced. Equality also implied that coming through imperfect media and to imperfect people they were equally open to error and imperfection. Hence the need for openness to learn from one another and to blend in ones own the acceptable features of other faiths. Gandhi proposed this as the only position consistent with love(non-violence) and truth. This should be the stand of every seeker of truth. Religion (thus imperfect) was always subject to a process of evolution and re-interpretation. Progress towards truth, towards God, was possible only because of such evolution 101. It is clear that this is a realistic view of religion. And he

Young India September 25, 1925.

M. K. Gandhi, From Yeravda Mandir op.cit.: 25-29.

proposed evolution as the condition of progress in religion. There is no reason to speak of one religion superior to another, but to seek a fellowship of faiths and aspirations for goodwill and unity.

# 6.13 Why Gandhi opposed proselytization?

Gandhi's opposition to proselytization can be summarised as follows.

## **6.13.1** Conversion is internal change

In September, 1935 Mr. A.A. Paul of the Federation of International Fellowships submitted to Gandhi nine 'propositions' dealing with mass conversion of Harijans' to Christianity and he solicited Gandhi's comments. The propositions among other things defined conversion as change of heart to God from sin, and underscored Christ's role in it as bringing Gods life to humans, the Christian's privilege and duty to speak to sinners of salvation through Jesus, and Christian's right to admit to Church any seeker. If Harijans could be saved from the tyranny of social imbalance through conversion Christians should not be accused of using material inducements.

In reply to these 'propositions' Gandhi wrote: they can be applied only to individual cases and never to the masses of mankind. He questioned the propriety of presenting an untested belief in Christ as Saviour to the professor of another faith which was also equally valid. Gandhi said God alone knew a man's heart and he questioned the

Christians' right in accepting as his duty the care of the sincere converts. Gandhi explained:

> "I believe that there is no such thing as conversion from one faith to another in the accepted sense of the term. It is a highly personal matter for the individual and his God. I may not have any design upon my neighbour as to his faith which I must honor even as I honour my own Christian missions will render true service to India, if they can persuade themselves to confine their activities to humanitarian service without the ulterior motive of converting India or at least her unsophisticated villagers to Christianity" 102.

Gandhi persisted in his attitude to conversion despite attempts by Christians to effect a change in his position. This is clear from the following statement of Gandhi in the year 1937.

> "I stand on unassailable ground when I assert, that it is a travesty of religion to seek to uproot from the Harijans' simple minds such faith as they have in their ancestral religion and to transfer their allegiance to another, even though that other may be as good and equal to the original in quality...But my fear is that, though Christian friends now a days do not say or admit that Hindu religion is untrue, they must harbour in their breasts the belief that Hinduism is an error and that Christianity as they

<sup>102</sup> CWMG Vol. 61:458.

believe it is the only true religion. Without some such thing it is not possible to understand, much less to appreciate the CMS appeal from which I reproduced in these columns some revealing extracts the other day. One could understand that attack on untouchability and many other errors that have crept into Hindu life. And if they would help us to get rid of the admitted abuses and purify our religion, they would be gratefully accepted. But so far as one can understand the present effort, it is to uproot Hinduism from the very foundation and replace it by another faith. It is like as attempt to destroy a house which though badly in want of repair appears to the dweller quite decent and habitable. No wonder he welcomes those who show him how to repair it and even offer to do so themselves. But he would most, decidedly resist those who sought to destroy the house that had served well him and his ancestors for ages, unless he the dweller, was convinced that the house was beyond repair and unfit for human habitation". 103.

Gandhi also believed that if one followed one's own religion sincerely it would be enough to develop the right attitude to other religions. A good Hindu will also be a good Christian according to him. In a conversation with Andrews he said: "If a person wants to believe in Bible, let him say so, but why should be disregard his own religion? This proselytization will mean no peace in the world. Religion is a very

personal matter. We should be living the life according to our lights share the best with one another, thus adding to the sum total of human efforts to reach God", 104.

However, Gandhi was not blindly opposed to individual conversion emanating from deep conviction, spiritual urge or internal change. He said:

> "I have nothing against change of faith out of heart-felt conviction and spiritual urge. Having become a Harijan by choice, I know the mind of the Harijans. There is not a single Harijan today who can fall in this category. What do they understand of Islam? Nor do they understand why they are Hindus. This is true of the followers of all faiths. They are what they are because they are born in a particular faith. If they change their religion, it will be from compulsion or some temptations held out to them in return. In the present atmosphere, no voluntary change of faith should have any validity. Religion should be dearer than life itself, 105.

What Gandhi opposed was conversion in the sense in which it was generally understood whether it was called *suddhi* by Hindus, *tabligh* by Muslims or proselytizing by Christians. He did not oppose it in the

CWMG Vol. 64: 440-441.

Ibid.

M.K. Gandhi, Delhi Diary Prayer Speeches from 10.9.1947 to 30.1.1948 (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1960) 78.

sense of a genuine internal change which a person who was free and mature may undergo without force or fraud or material inducement. Gandhi pointed out that it was difficult to know whether in the case of people or even ones own case, whether an internal change had really taken place. According to him, God alone knew what took place within a man. For illustrating an example of genuine conversion Gandhi cited the case of Saul accepting Christ and becoming Paul. To Gandhi, if a person through fear, compulsion, starvation or for material gain or consideration, went over to another faith it was a misnomer to call it conversion. Real conversion sprang from the heart and at the prompting of God, not of a stranger 106.

#### 6.13.2 Conversion vis-a-vis: Sarvadharma Samabhava

Religion was the mainspring of all activities of Gandhi and for him a religion that did not concern itself with all aspects and dimensions of life was no religion at all. "Religion which takes no account of practical affairs and does not help to solve them is no religion" said Gandhi.

Gandhi firmly believed that the spirit of religion should pervade all our activities but he again cautioned us that here religion did not mean sectarianism. It meant a belief in the ordered moral government of the universe. This religion transcended Hinduism, Islam,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>106</sup> M.K. Gandhi, Christian Missions op. cit.: 83.

<sup>107</sup> Young India May 7, 1925.

Christianity etc. but did not supersede them. On the other hand it harmonised them and gave them reality. It was this understanding of the harmonising capacity of religions(which is their basic purpose) that prompted Gandhi to declare repeatedly that 'though religions are many, Religion is one'. In short; "religion meant to Gandhi deep faith in God and in the moral governance of the universe and organising life and its activities strictly in accordance with this moral law".

The question naturally comes up: Why are there many religions when, Gandhi said, Religion is one? Since belief in one God is the corner stone of all religions, in theory there can only be one religion. "But I do not foresee a time," wrote Gandhi, "when there would only be one religion on earth in practice…", because, "in practice no two persons I have known have had the same identical conception of God. Therefore, there will perhaps, always be different religions answering to different temperaments and climatic conditions.

As religions proceeded from the same God and were rooted in the same moral principles, Gandhi argued that they were more or less true. He further said that no religion could be perfect because religion was conceived by man, and man by nature was imperfect <sup>109</sup>. Gandhi wrote subsequently:

M.P. Mathai, <u>Mahatma Gandhi's World View</u> (New Delhi: Gandhi Peace Foundation, 2000) 137-138.

R.K. Prabhu & U.R. Rao, <u>The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi</u> (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1996) 66.

"And if we are imperfect ourselves, religions as conceived by us must be also be imperfect. We have not realised religion in its perfection, even as we have not realised God...And if all faiths outlined by men are imperfect, the question of comparative merit does not arise. All faiths constitute a revelation of Truth, but all are imperfect and liable to error".

Gandhi also believed that all religions are different paths leading to the same goal of God realisation<sup>111</sup>.

Since different roads converge to the same point he said that it doesn't matter that we take different roads so long as we reach the same goal<sup>112</sup>. All religions were given for the mutual benefit of mankind, all contained truth and they all had the same source of inspiration. Hence he was against all kinds of proselytizing and considered conversion in the sense of proselytization a major error and a great impediment towards peace. He said: "I disbelieve in the conversion of one person by another. My efforts should never be to undermine another's faith but to make him a better follower of his own faith. This implies belief in the truth of all religions and therefore respect for them"<sup>113</sup>. Equal respect of all

M.K. Gandhi, <u>From Yeravda Mandir</u> op.cit.: 38-39.

J.B. Kripalani, <u>Gandhi His Life and Thought</u> (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1991) 319.

M.K. Gandhi, <u>Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule</u> (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1996) 45-46.

Raghavan N. Iyer, ed. <u>The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi</u> <u>Vol.1</u> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) 457.

religions or equality of religions (*Sarvadharma Samabhava*) is central principle in Gandhi's attitude to religions. Equal respect for all religions as a dynamic concept also meant a reverential study of the scriptures of all religions, especially of other religions than one's own<sup>114</sup>. According to Gandhi, this equal respect of religions was our duty because our own religion was imperfect as others. The peculiar religious situation in India were Hindus, Musalmans, Christians etc. live together also demand it. So in Gandhi's opinion, the need of the moment was not one religion but mutual respect and tolerance and devotees of different religions<sup>115</sup>. Hence conversion is unnecessary and uncalled for.

#### **6.13.3** Conversion denationalises converts

Another concern expressed by Gandhi was related to the attitude to the nation and national issues inculcated by the missionaries in the newly converted Christians. It was found that some missionaries demanded a change of loyalty to Europe from the new converts. Most of the converts were persuaded to discard totally their own mother tongue and to bring up their children in the western way of life. Gandhi considered it a mere aping of Europeans by Indian converts and called it a violence done to their own country. Such a cultural sabotage was tantamount to denationalisation and Europeanization. The opposition to this sort of denationalisation came not only from Gandhi but also

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>114</sup> M.P. Mathai, op.cit.: 119.

Young India September 25, 1924.

from concerned Christians in India who were deeply worried about this problem. For instance Rajkumari Amrit Kaur wrote to Gandhi:

"Many converts have been denationalised, e.g. even their names have been changed in many instances to those of Europeans; they have been told that there is no true light to be found in the religion of their forefathers. The ancient scriptures of their ancestors are a closed book to them... They have had implanted in them a psychology of fear in regard to their non-Christian brothers. How often have I not heard educated Christians saying that, if the British Raj were to be removed, the first people to suffer a wholesale massacre would be the Indian Christian community! The warring sects of various Christian churches have each formed their communities in India, with the result that the seed of those very dissensions which have been the cause of strife within the Christian Church in the west has been sown here" 116.

She asked Gandhi to help Indian Christians to realise the mistake and correct it. To this Gandhi replied: "Conversion must not mean denationalisation conversion should mean a definite giving up of the evil of the old adoption of all good of the new, and a scrupulous avoidance of everything evil in the new".

Quoted in Vishwanath Tandon "Gandhi and Proselytization", <u>GANDHI MARG</u> Volume 21, Number 2 July- September (1999): 169.

<sup>117</sup> C.F. Andrews, Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas op.cit.: 90.

British missionaries also tried to create a fear of psychosis in the minds of the new converts by saying that continuance of British Government was essential for their protection and that their lives will be insecure if India became independent and a national government took over. Needless to say that this amounted to clear anti-national activity. Gandhi saw the dangers inherent in both these attempts made by missionaries as part of proselytization and hence disapproved it.

# 6.13.4 Missionaries took advantage of the disabilities of people

The conversion of Harijans' to Christianity was a much debated question during Gandhi's time. It was of course a complex and a many sided issue. Christian missionaries had discussed this question also with Gandhi on several occasions. Gandhi particularly took up two central issues involved in it. One related to the general disabilities suffered by Harijans and other depressed classes. The next one related to the specific issue of untouchability.

It was Gandhi's considered view that Christian missionaries generally tried to take advantage of the many disabilities suffered by the weaker sections of Indian society, particularly the Harijans' and other depressed classes. It was a kind of exploitation, according to Gandhi. He argued that appeal for conversion should be addressed to a person's sense of reason and conscience. Those in whom the power of reason is inadequately developed would not be able to weigh the merits of the appeal and accept it or reject it on merit. Gandhi believed

that the sense of discrimination was not adequately developed among those who belonged to the depressed classes and the Harijans. The vast mass of the people of India could not understand the pros and cons of Christianity better than a cow, he argued and requested Christian missionaries to withdraw from what he considered indecent competition to convert Harijans. He said further:

"Their behaviour has been as bad as that of the rest who are in the field to add to their numbers. What pains one is their frantic attempt to exploit the weakness of Harijans'...This is no matter for bargain. You must say definitely that this is a matter to be settled by the Hindu themselves" <sup>118</sup>.

Gandhi cited examples of Christians like Ralph Richard Keithan, Verier Elwin, Charles Freer Andrews and others who served the masses without any ulterior motive. When one felt that he had received peace from a particular interpretation of the Bible he could share it with others. It need not be given a vocal expression. Missionaries should live according to their light and work among the poor selflessly <sup>119</sup>.

Gandhi emphasised the central importance of living the Christian truth and faith rather than preaching it. He opined: "When there is no medium between me and my Lord and I simply become a

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>118</sup> <u>CWMG</u> Vol. 64: 18.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>119</sup> M.K. Gandhi, Christian Missions op. cit: 152.

willing, vessel for his influence to flow into it, Then I overflow as the water of the Gange's at its source. There is no desire to speak when one lives the truth. Truth is most economical of words. There is thus no truer or other evangelism them life" 120.

Gandhi stuck to his position against conversion especially on mass movement of conversion till the end of his life and he always expressed his concern that disabilities of the Harijans' were being exploited by missions to tear them away from their roots in the ancestral religious community and social structure.

### 6.13.5 Christian churches are not free from untouchability

Gandhi chided Christian missionaries for their 'irreligious gamble' for converts. He said that it was the way a man lived and not the recital of a verse, or the form of a prayer, which made him a good Christian, a good Muslim or a good Hindu<sup>121</sup>. The missionaries' bid to save souls struck him as presumptuous. In the case of untouchables and Harijans. Gandhi firmly believed that their conversion was not the result of a spiritual hunger but a matter of convenience. To Gandhi untouchability was a sin against God, a sting which passed from generation, a shame of Hinduism, and great impediment for untouchables progress. This evil had grown like a canker in the heart of Hinduism, just in the same way as colour prejudice had sprung up in certain lands in the

CWMG Vol. 64: 101.

B.R. Nanda, Gandhi and his Critics (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985) 6-7.

heart of the Christian Church. For Gandhi this was a religious problem and therefore the Hindus themselves should deliberate on it and make a conscious effort, not by way of policy, but by self purification, to solve this. Gandhi could see that it was not Hinduism alone that suffered from the canker of untouchability, Indian churches too were not free from the taint of this problem. This is proved by experience Andrews also endorse this view:

"It is a fact to be mentioned with great shame and inward reproach by those of us who are members of the Christian Church that in Travancore the Church itself is not free from these very evils, and therefore it has hitherto failed. It has even in the past been an interest partner and has countenanced "untouchability" in practice.... It has gradually become a silent sanctioner and approver of "untouchability".

Rajkumari Amrit Kaur also condemned the practice of untouchability in Indian Christian Churches. She said that, while there had been no conscious effort to purge the Indian Church of the taint of untouchability that existed within its own fold, the untouchability that existed in Hinduism had been exploited to the extent of attempted mass and wholesale conversion to Christianity of the depressed classes. Speaking to converts she found that, many do not have any spiritual implications of their change of faith. Conversion only resulted in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>122</sup> C.F. Andrews, Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas op. cit.: 173-174.

transplanting them to an alien cultural soil where they could find no roots. Gandhi considered untouchability as 'excrescence', an 'untruth', the biggest blot on Hinduism and a great lie. He argued that it was not only unreasonable but also morally degrading and abominable to think that a person should be treated an untouchable or unapproachable because of his birth. He called it rank irreligion fit only to be destroyed. On this problem Gandhi commented that Harijans who changed their faith to escape hardships inflicted on them by caste Hindus had fared no better in Christian fold. The stigmas of untouchability was still attached to them. He said that oppression can be no reason for changing one's faith. He meticulously added: untouchability in Christianity is also bound to go. Conversion is not a solution 124.

#### 6.13.6 Missionaries commercialise their service

Religion for Gandhi was basically a matter of conscience. It was the noblest expression of the sublime aspirations of human beings. One should approach religion, Gandhi believed, with the purest of intentions To use it for any purpose other than linking one with God was a sacrilege, according to Gandhi. So he evaluated all religious activities on the basis of the intentions behind it. He believed that serving one's fellow human beings without the slightest thought of the self or in other words self less service was the best expression of and

M.K. Gandhi, <u>All are Equal in the eyes of God</u> (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1994)3.

M. K. Gandhi, <u>The Removal of Untouchability</u> op.cit.: 135-136.

the highest religion. He evaluated Christian missionary work using the above yardstick and found that most of the missionaries were commercialising their work because at the back of their service they had the hope that the recipients will eventually accept Christ as their Saviour and embrace Christianity. Deeply disturbed by this hidden motive of Christian missionaries Gandhi asked: Why shouldn't your service be its own reward?<sup>125</sup>. He said further:

"I hold that proselytizing under the cloak of humanitarian work is, to say the least, unhealthy. It is must certainly resented by the people here. Religion after all is a personal matter, it touches the heart. Why should I change my religion because a doctor who professes Christianity as his religion has cured me of some disease or why should the doctor expect or suggest such a change whilst I am under his influence?. Is not medical relief its own reward and satisfaction? or why should I whilst I am in a missionary educational institution have Christian teaching thrust up on me?. In my opinion these practices are not uplifting and give rise to suspicion if not even secret hostility. The methods of conversion must like Caesar's wife above suspicion" 126.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>125</sup> CWMG Vol. 65: 81.

R. K. Prabhu, ed. <u>Truth is God</u> by M.K.Gandhi (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1987)65-66.

Gandhi asked missionaries not to commercialise their humanitarian work and not use these activities for the purpose of proselytizing .All faiths are equally dear to their respective votaries. What was wanted was a living friendly contact among the followers of the great religions of the world and not a clash among them in the fruitless attempt on the part of each community to show superiority of its faith over the rest.

### 6.13.7 Christianity is not an exclusive religion

Many theological arguments are advanced by the Christian missionaries in support of their Christian exclusivism\* This was also used as the main augment in support of proselytizing activity. Gandhi did not accept this exclusivist claim advanced by Christian theologians and missionaries. He regarded all religions as equal-equally true and equally imperfect. It meant that salvation is possible in and through all religions provided the votaries followed the path suggested by their respective religions properly. It could be seen that Gandhi's arguments in this connection were more in tune with the concept of the universal salvific will of God, which means that the will of God operates through all religions and salvation is possible through each of them. Gandhi also did not accept the view that Jesus is the sole saviour. He was

<sup>\*</sup> Exclusivism in Christian theological understanding means strong emphasis on the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as saviour and that there is 'only one gospel', Jesus being the only God man, the only mediator between God and man and there is no other name. Exclusivists took the claims of the Bible seriously perhaps even literally.

against the literal interpretation of the Bible. He said: I regard Jesus as a great teacher of humanity, but I do not regard him as the only begotten son of God<sup>127</sup>. He regarded Jesus Christ as bright revelation but not the unique revelation<sup>128</sup>.

Once a Christian wrote to Gandhi in prison and told that Gandhi had to become a Christian since belief in Christ was essential for salvation. His reply was as follows:

"Why do you think that truth lies in believing in Jesus as you do? Again why do you think that an orthodox Hindu cannot follow out the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount? Are you sure again that you know Jesus and His teachings? I admire your zeal but I cannot congratulate you upon your wisdom. My forty-five years of prayer and meditation home not only left me without, an assurance of the type you credit yourself with, but have left me humbler than ever. The answer to my prayer is clear and emphatic that God is not encased in a safe to be approached only through a little hole bored in it, but that, He is open to be approached through billion of openings by those who are humble and pure in heart. I invite you to step down from your pinnacle where you have left room for none but yourself, 129.

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M.K. Gandhi, <u>Christian Missions</u> op. cit.: 161-162.

Quoted in Ignatius Jesudasan, <u>Gandhian Theology of Liberation</u> (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash,1987) 218-224.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>129</sup> CWMG Vol. 51 : 21.

Where as when Rajkumari Amrit Kaur asked whether there was place for Jesus Christ in Hinduism, he replied that there was room enough for Jesus, as there was for Mahomed, Zoroaster and Moses<sup>130</sup>. Gandhi compared different religions to different branches of a majestic tree or different flowers of he same garden<sup>131</sup>.

Further Gandhi maintained that there was no need to reconvert a person who had gone over to some other religion and who now repented his having done so. Gandhi said:

"And, as I believe in the equality of all the great religions of the earth, I regard no man as polluted because he has forsaken the branch on which he was sitting and gone over to another of the same tree. If he comes back to the original branch, he deserves to be welcomed and not told that he has committed a sin by reason of his having forsaken the family to which he belonged. In so far as he may be deemed to have erred, he has sufficiently purged himself of it when he repents of the error and retraces his steps" 132.

To Gandhi conversion really meant internal change. He believed that cases of real honest conversion were quite possible and that people could change religion for their inward satisfaction. But

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>130</sup> CWMG Vol. 64: 326.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid

Quoted in R.K. Gupta, "Gandhi on Conversion", <u>GANDHI MARG</u> Vol.22, Number 1 April-June (2000): 73.

change should be through the aid of God alone. No external inducements had any role there. In the case of vast mass of people particularly Harijans, he doubted whether it was real spiritual hunger that prompted them to change ancestral faith and embrace Christianity.

Gandhi explained that we may call ourselves Christians, Hindus or Mohammedans but beneath that diversity, there was a oneness and underneath many religions there was one religion. If only we could read scriptures of the different faith from the stand point of the followers of those faith, we should find that they were at, bottom all one and were helpful to one another. Hence there was no room or need for conversion. We must help a Hindu to become a better Hindu, a Mussalman to become a better Mussalman and a Christian a better Christian.

Hence Gandhi maintained, India was in no need of conversion which Christian missions had in mind. Conversion in the sense of self-purification, greater dedication was the need of the time. To those who were out to convert India he would say: "physicians heal thyself", 133.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>133</sup> Young India April 23, 1931.

# GANDHI'S MODEL FOR CHRISTIAN MISSIONS AND SOME CHRISTIAN RESPONSES

- 7.1 How should Christian missions conduct themselves?
  - 7.1.1 Live the message of Christ
  - 7.1.2 Drop the goal of proselytizing
  - 7.1.3 Do not belittle other faiths of the world
  - 7.1.4 Adopt the cross as a way of life.
- 7.2 Christian responses to the model offered by Gandhi
  - 7.2.1 Christians of Gandhi's inner circle
    - (i) C.F. Andrews
    - (a) Andrews and Christian missionary work in India
    - (b) The message and the person of Jesus
    - (c) On conversion
    - (d) On reverence for other faiths
  - (ii) S.K. George
    - (a) On the role of Christian missions in India
    - (b) Views on Christ
    - (c) Meaning of the cross
  - (iii) E. Stanley Jones
    - (a) From person to principle or vice-versa
    - (b) Contextualising the meaning of 'Christian': Gandhi's influence
    - (c) Views on conversion
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- Three contemporary witnesses 7.3.1 Maria Sadanam 7.3

  - 7.3.2 Daivadan Centre
  - 7.3.4 Oddanchatram Fellowship

#### CHAPTER SEVEN

# GANDHI'S MODEL FOR CHRISTIAN MISSIONS AND SOME CHRISTIAN RESPONSES

In the last chapter we examined Gandhi's encounter with Christianity and Christian missions and surveyed his response to Christian missionary activities prevalent in India during his time. Gandhi had considered views about what the role of Christians and Christian missions in India ought to be. Although he did not subscribe to most of the views expressed by Christian missionaries and was strongly opposed to a number of their activities he saw that Christian missionaries could play a positive role in India if they were sensitive to the religious sensibilities of the followers of other religions. India being a plural society it was essential to respect the importance of pluralism in order to maintain the harmony of social relations. So he exhorted Christian missionaries to respect other religions in the spirit of the universal salvific will of God and organise their activities in keeping with the message of the Sermon on the Mount.

Gandhi believed that the ultimate aim of life was God realisation and that, God would be realised only by identifying oneself with God's creation. Identification with the rest of creation meant for Gandhi serving them selflessly. He argued that the orientation of the

activities of the Christian missions also must be helping the helpless masses of India through selfless service. He was very outspoken in his criticism of mission activities as he found them to be directed not towards the above stated goal but towards proselytization and deculturization (europenization). As Gandhi was conscious of the potential of Christian missions he wanted them to correct themselves and reorientate their programmes with the message of the Sermon on the Mount in view. So he did not hesitate to offer his suggestions when he was requested to do so by various Christian missions. In the following pages an attempt is made to systemise the main suggestions offered by Gandhi on various occasions in his dialogues with Christian missions working in India. It is to be mentioned in this context that Gandhi and Christian missions maintained a very healthy dialogical relationship throughout his lifetime and developed their dialogue to a very high level of moral and intellectual significance. It may also be stated to the profit of all concerned that the Gandhi-Christian dialogue could serve as an excellent model of inter religious dialogue in a pluralist context.

#### 7.1 How should Christian missions conduct themselves?

The views expressed by Gandhi on how the Christian missions should work in a country like India is summarised under four heads below.

## 7.1.1 Live the message of Christ

According to Gandhi "where there is boundless love and no idea of retaliation what ever, it is Christianity that lives. But then it surmounts all boundaries and book-teaching"<sup>1</sup>. Then it is something indefinable, not capable of being preached, not capable of being transmitted from mouth to mouth, but from heart to heart. Gandhi admitted that there was enough in the Bible authority for Christians to invite people to a better way of life. But he did not see that it involved an invitation to join a new religious community. He told a missionary nurse thus: "It is not he who says 'Lord,' that is a true Christian. And cannot he who has not heard the name of Christ Jesus do the will of the Lord"<sup>2</sup>?

Gandhi believed that many men, who had never heard the name of Jesus Christ or had even rejected the official interpretation of Christianity, will be owned by Christ.

Gandhi said it was greater joy for him that God and Christianity could be found also in institution that did not call themselves Christians<sup>3</sup>. But when it had the backing of rulers, Church distorted the message of Jesus, an Asiatic, into an imperialistic faith. In India it had been inextricably mixed up with British rule. "It appears to us as synonymous with materialistic civilisation and imperialistic

Anand T. Hingorani, <u>The Message</u> op.cit.: 40.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> CWMG Vol. 61: 47.

Alice M. Barnes ed. My Dear Child Letters by M.K.Gandhi to Esther Fearing (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1959) 45.

exploitation by the stronger white race of the weaker races of the world, whose contribution to India had been largely of a negative character", wrote Gandhi.

In several missionary meetings Gandhi frankly told the missionaries that, if they had refrained from telling India about Christ but had merely lived the life enjoined upon them by the Sermon on the mount India, instead of suspecting them would have appreciated their living in there midst. Jesus preached not a new religion, but a new way of life, Gandhi reminded them. Quoting Jesus: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter in to the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my father which is in Heaven<sup>5</sup>", he drew their attention to the emphasis Jesus put on practice rather than preaching.

For Gandhi the Sermon on the Mount was the essence of Christianity and it was the Sermon that endeared Jesus to him. He said: "Eventhough some has proved that Jesus never lived and what was narrated in the Gospel was a figment of the writers imagination, the Sermon on the mount still be true for me". In an interview to the press during the second Round Table Conference in London Gandhi said:

"It is two thousand years since Christ preached his Sermon on the Mount and the world has adopted only a fragment of the

<sup>4</sup> CWMG Vol.58: 59.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> CWMG Vol. 65: 296.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> CWMG Vol. 48: 438-439.

imperishable lofty precepts there in enunciated for the conduct of men toward man. Until we take Christ's principles to our hearts, war, hatred and violence will continue"<sup>7</sup>.

Gandhi believed, when one lived the truth there would be no desire to preach and teach. Truth was the most economical of words. There was thus no truer evangelism than life. Some Christian friends approached Gandhi for seeking guidance. He told them that there should be less of theology and more truth in what they said and did. He cited examples of two of his good Christian friends, Andrews and Samuel E. Stokes, who gave up theology and decided to live the gospel of Christ.

Responding to a missionary on the best way of preaching Christ in India he insisted that it had to be through a life of silent service and simplicity and not by loud preaching with words. He said:

"To live the gospel is the most effective way most effective in the beginning, in the middle and in to the end. Preaching jars on me and makes no appeal to me, and I get suspicious of missionaries who preach. But I love those who never preach but live the life according to their lights. Their lives are silent, yet most effective, testimonies. Therefore I cannot say what to preach, but I can say that a life of service and uttermost simplicity is the best preaching. If therefore, you go on serving people and ask them also to serve, they would

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Ibid.: 318-320.

understand. But you quote instead John 3, 16 and ask them to believe it. That has no appeal to me, and I am sure people will not understand it. Where there has been acceptance of the gospel through preaching, my complaint is that there has been some motive... 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 religious and spiritual life is much finer and subtler than that of the rose"<sup>8</sup>.

Gandhi's major objection to Christian missionary project was with regard to their insistence that no religions other than Christianity were true. He was also against the glorification of conversion. The Christian missionary assumption that except if one was saved by belief in Jesus' saving power one was doomed to destruction was a fallacy, he argued. He had discussed this problem with several Christians. On this quarrel over the question of religious labels he asked one lady Emily: "Cannot a few hundred Indians or Africans live the message of Christ without being called Christians"? In a message to the entire of Christian world he said:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> M.K. Gandhi, <u>Truth is God</u> op.cit.: 67-68.

<sup>9</sup> M.K. Gandhi, Christian Missions op.cit.: 214.

"I claim to be a man of faith and prayer, and even if I was cut to pieces God would give me the strength not to deny Him and to assert that He is. The Muslim says: He is and there is no one else. The Christian says the same thing and so the Hindu, and if I may say so, even the Buddhist says the same thing, if in different words. We may each of us be putting our own interpretation on the word God-God who embraces not only this tiny globe of ours, but million and billions of such globes. How can we, little crawling creatures... measure His greatness, who is so forgiving, so divine? And hence I say that, we do not need to proselytise or do *Shuddhi* or *Tabligh* through our speech or writing. We can only do it really with our lives" 10.

Gandhi persuaded his Christian friends to take these views as their mission. Then there would be no distrust, no suspicion, no jealously and no dissension. He wished every Christian to become Christ-like. He cited Albert Schweitzer as example of a real Christian who gave Christianity a unique interpretation when he himself resolved "not to preach any more, not to lecture any more, but to bury himself in Equatorial Africa simply with a view to fulfil somewhat the debt that Europe owes to Africa" 11.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Ibid: 116-118.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> M.K. Gandhi, <u>Christian Missions</u> op.cit.: 134.

#### 7.1.2 Drop the goal of proselytizing

Christian mission has an openly avowed objective-that is imparting the knowledge of Jesus Christ as the only revelation of God to the masses who are believed to be perishing for lack of that knowledge and a programme of action to achieve this. Preaching the Bible, disseminating the knowledge of the scriptures, baptising converts and gathering them into the fold of the church away from the contagion of their heathen surroundings are clearly defined items in the programmes of missionaries. This was true of early missionaries also. Works of philanthropy, social uplift, medical aid or educational service were/are undertaken with the sole objective of furthering the one end of saving souls of the people to whom a such services were/are offered.

In the light of non-Christian criticism the modern missions (unlike their predecessors) are not using philanthropic service as bait to attract fellow countrymen to Christianity. But every item of missionary enterprise was/is meant to subserve the end of evangelism and was/is expected to yield tangible result in conversion. Gandhi had commented on this problem on many occasions. When a friend pointed out the work done by the Salvation Army, he said; "Their social work is undertaken not for its own sake but as an aid to the salvation of those who receive social service. The history of India would have been written differently if the Christians had come to India to live their lives in our midst and permeate ours with their aroma if there was any. There would then have been mutual goodwill and utter absence of

suspicion"<sup>12</sup>. He therefore asked: "Will not the great missionary bodies of India, to whom India owes a deep debt of gratitude for what they have done and are doing, do still better and serve the spirit to Christianity better by dropping the goal of proselytizing while continuing their philanthropic work"<sup>13</sup>?

Gandhi exhorted Christian mission to confine themselves purely to humanitarian work such as education, medical service to the poor and the like and to withdraw if they use these activities for the purpose of proselytizing. He went on to say that: "Every nation considers its own faith to be as good as that of any other. Certainly the great faiths held by the people of India are adequate for her people. India stands in no need of conversion from one faith to another".

In the context of religious pluralism Gandhi asked Christians to strive to enshrine Jesus in the hearts of their fellow men by the radiance and joy of his continual presence in their own lives. They will have to seek him and worship him in the lowliest of God's creation. He opined: "If the Christian missions had come to render humanitarian service to the poor village folk, without the proselytizing motive, they would have earned their underlying gratitude and proved themselves true heirs and representatives of Jesus Christ" 15.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> CWMG Vol. 65: 295.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> C.F. Andrews, <u>Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas</u> op.cit.: 121.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> CWMG Vol.46: 28.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> <u>CWMG</u> Vol. 87: 208.

Gandhi was persistently questioned on the issue of conversion. Once some missionary ladies asked Gandhi, whether they should not share the spiritual solace of Jesus with others particularly the Harijans who do not get it from their ancestral religion or in other words, how they are to meet the Harijans' spiritual needs. Gandhi replied: "By behaving just like the rose. Does the rose proclaim itself, or is it self-propagated? Has it army of missionaries proclaiming its beauties?" <sup>16</sup>. There were Christian missionaries who shared this view of Gandhi. Rev. Ralph Keithan for example endorsed this view by saying that, "we need not talk about Jesus. People would be attracted by our lives if our lives were Christ-like" <sup>17</sup>.

In short Gandhi's plea to Christian missions was to identify with the masses of India, remove the distress of people and serve them in a receptive mood. He exhorted the missionaries to open their ears eyes and most of all their hearts to receive all that is good in this land and finally to refrain from just preaching about Jesus but to live a life enjoined upon them by the Sermon on the Mount.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> CWMG Vol. 60: 325.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> R.R. Keithan, Pilgrimage in India (Madras: CLS, 1973) 38.

#### 7.1.3 Do not belittle other faiths of the world

The attitude of the nineteenth century Christian missions to Hinduism and Indian culture was totally negative. The goal of missions was not only to convert the Indian heathens to Christianity but also to civilise them. Most missionaries of that period believed that Christianity was also the civilising factor. This phase lasted for over a century, from the beginning of the nineteenth century to at least the two decades of the twentieth. Christianity was therefore projected both as an answer and a means to civilising a depraved people. The following opinion of Claudius Buchanan is typical:

"The Hindu children have no moral instruction...The Hindus have no moral books. What branch of their mythology has not more of falsehood and vice in it, can of truth and virtue? They have no moral gods. The robber and the prostitute lift up their hands with the infant and the priest, before an horrible idol of clay painted red, deformed and disgusting as the vices which are practiced before it".

The British evangelicals like Charles Grant, Macaulay, Wilberforce and Buchanan painted a very dark picture of the people of India. This abusive tradition reached its climax in Alexander Duff a Scottish missionary at Calcutta. For him, of all the systems of false

Quoted in Chaturvedi Badrinath, <u>Finding Jesus in Dharma- Christianity in India</u> (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2000) 23-24.

religion over fabricated by the perverse ingenuity of fallen man Hinduism was surely the most stupendous <sup>19</sup>.

This unfriendly and arrogant attitude of English missions made Christianity a discredited phenomenon in the Indian eyes. Right from his South African days Gandhi was keenly aware of the cultural dimension of colonialism. In Hind Swaraj he explained that real freedom for India did not mean expelling the British but meant freeing it from the infection of modern western civilisation. He rejected the modern western civilisation lock, stock and barrel. By contrast, India's own ancient civilisation was greatly superior to it because it upheld belief in God and safeguarded morality whereas western civilisation failed to do so<sup>20</sup>.

Gandhi did not include Christianity as such in his critique of modern western civilisation. But he became openly critical of the form Christianity had taken in the west. On many occasions he said that western Christianity in its practical working was a negation of Christ's Christianity and that Jesus would not have approved of its modern organisation and ministry found in the west. He made it clear that he did not approve of Indians accepting Christianity in preference to their own religions or considering one religion inferior to another. Instead

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Ibid.

M.K. Gandhi, Hind Swaraj op.cit.: 5-85.

he asked the missionaries to co-operate with this principle by dropping the goal of proselytizing<sup>21</sup>.

Gandhi identified conversion to Christianity as a form of imperialistic exploitation. He told an American journalist: "You send the missionaries here for nothing, but that also is part of the imperialist exploitation. For they would like to make us, like you, better buyers of your goods and unable to do without your motorcars and luxuries. So the Christianity that you send us is adulterated. If you establish your schools and colleges and hospitals without the object of adding to the number of so-called Christian population your philanthropy would be untainted"<sup>22</sup>. Because missionaries had brought a western form of Christianity to India and their converts had accepted it with all western trappings, their mission in India appeared to be indistinguishable from western imperialism. One of his most direct attacks on the missionaries for undermining native's faith appeared as follows:

"It pains me to a have to say that the Christian missionaries as a body, with honourable exceptions, have actively supported a system which has improvised, enervated, demoralised a people considered to be among the greatest and most civilized on earth" <sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> CWMG Vol. 13: 220.

D.G. Tendulkar, MAHATMA- Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi Volume
 V (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1990) 335.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> CWMG Vol. 24: 476.

Hence Gandhi advised the missionaries not to assume that only they possessed the key to spiritual joy and peace, and that the adherents of different faiths could never get the same joy from their faiths. His appeal to Christian friends was for a prayerful and sympathetic study of other scriptures of the world. He testified that: "Whilst such study has enabled me to give the same respect to them that I give to my own, it has enriched my own faith and broadened my vision" The implication is obvious. The missionaries may follow this approach and gain the same benefit.

## 7.1.4 Adopt the cross as a way of life

On the basis of a thorough reading of the Bible Gandhi came to revere Jesus for his teachings as given in the Sermon on the Mount and for his sacrificial death on the cross. Gandhi often said that Jesus expressed as no one else could the spirit of and will of God. In Gandhi's view Jesus' death on the cross was a supreme example of commitment and self-sacrifice. He acknowledged his indebtedness to the Sermon on the Mount and also to the suffering love shown by Jesus on the cross for his advocacy of non-violence. It may be recalled in this context that many Christian leaders have acknowledged that through Gandhi's life and actions the cross has come to live again. His life had been an attempt to make the central principle of Christian gospel i.e. the cross of self-chosen, unresisting, redemptive suffering alive and thereby regeneration of the world which had become in many way

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> CWMG Vol.71: 80.

effete<sup>25</sup>. It is, therefore, quite natural that the core of Gandhi's exhortion to Christians in general and to the missionaries in particular was to live the message of cross as exemplified in the life of Jesus and not just preach it.

To Gandhi the cross was the greatest example of selfless and sacrificial love. He did not accept the traditional interpretation of the cross. He said Christianity's particular contribution was that of active love. No other religion said so firmly that God was love and the New Testament was full of the word. It was the conviction of Gandhi that an undogmatic Christianity, true to the spirit to Jesus, could yet discover and establish links with the noble elements in all religions. He maintained that the cross undoubtedly made a universal appeal the moment one gave it a universal meaning in the place of the narrow one that was often heard at the ordinary meetings<sup>26</sup>. He wanted Christians to adopt the cross not as religious symbol of power and might but as an active force in practical life where the healing work of love and compassion had to be carried out. This did not consist in turning away from poverty, misery and ignorance but facing them and fighting them.

'Take the cross' was the call of Jesus Christ, Gandhi reminded the Christian missions. Many Christians had talked about and debated and disputed interminably on this subject. But Gandhi decided to turn

S. Radhakrishnan, <u>Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections on His Life and Work</u> (Madras: Jaico, 1986) 101.

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M.K. Gandhi, My Dear Child op.cit.: 100.

this call into practice in daily applications of life. Gandhi acted on what he saw and it made the difference. He did not see in the cross what the convinced Christians saw namely that God was in Christ reconciling the world into himself and that he was bearing our sins in his body on a tree. Instead, he did see the cross as a way of suffering and thus conquer the heart of another. He put this into practice not only at the personal level but at a national scale. He called his method Satyagraha, a religious method of overcoming evil with good and righting wrongs through selfsuffering. It sought to win over the opponent by patient self-suffering. In the cross of Christ Gandhi found the supreme example of Satyagraha. To him Christ was the Prince of passive resisters (satyagrahies)<sup>27</sup>. Gandhi's understanding and practice of the cross brought out fresh aspects of Jesus' life and character which the Christians had not so clearly perceived. He familiarised India and the world with a new conception of Jesus Christ as the supreme example of a *satyagrahi*. So his advice to the Christian missions was to adopt the message of the cross as a way of life by accepting patient self suffering in their service of the wretched of the earth. In a message he said: "living Christ means a living cross without it life is a living death"<sup>28</sup>.

Once Gandhi said that though he could not claim to be a Christian in the sectarian sense, the example of Jesus' suffering was a

CWMG Vol. 90: 503.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> R.K. Prabhu, ed. What Jesus Means to Me by M.K.Gandhi (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1959) 16.

factor in the composition of his undying faith in non-violence which ruled all his actions, worldly and temporal. He further said that there are hundreds of Christians who believed likewise<sup>29</sup>.

The universality and transcendence which Gandhi recognised in and accorded to Jesus was related to the universal appeal in the cross and in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The universality he saw in the cross was a potential universality, depending on the meaning given to the cross. Gandhi believed that the Christian usage confining it to Jesus had failed to recognise the universality of the cross and of Jesus Christ of the cross as well. The cross of Jesus was to him an eloquent sermon proclaiming that, nations like individuals could only be made through the agony of the cross and in no other way<sup>30</sup>.

## 7.2 Christian responses to the model offered by Gandhi

## **Background**

It is no secret that Christian missions during colonial period were supporters of the British Raj and were open apologists for the colonial rule. Many missionaries had a prejudicial attitude towards Indian culture and the nationalist movement, and did not co-operate with Gandhi and his programmes. Criticising this attitude of missions,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> <u>CWMG</u> Vol. 68: 278.

G. Ramachandran & T.K. Madhavan, eds. Quest For Gandhi (New Delhi: Gandhi Peace Foundation, 1970) 104.

S.K. George a leading Christian nationalist wrote to Metropolitan Foss Westcott the following letter in 1930 saying:

"Yours at best is double devotion-and when the material interests of the two countries clash-as they do almost decidedly at the present time-God alone knows which way your sympathies swing. Instances are too rare for us to believe too easily the claim of any British missionary that he sets loyalty to truth and justice higher than loyalty to his nation. Christianity in India is languishing for lack of such exhibitions of real Christianity and true Internationalism..."

When Gandhi launched his civil disobedience programme the missions were far from sympathetic to it. It took an evasive attitude to Gandhi's nationalist programmes. For example an editorial of NCCR the official organ of National Christian Council of India said as follows:

"If we are silent it is not because we are not of sympathy with the national aspirations of India, nor because we fail to appreciate the many serious difficulties that beset, the path of Government; but because we are baffled by a situation that is not our making"<sup>32</sup>.

Yamunacharya ed. "Correspondence between S.K.George and Lord Bishop", THE FFT QUARTERLY S.K. George Souvenir Vol. 7 (1960): 10.

Editorial Notes, NCCR Vol.L, No.6 June (1930): 269-270.

The editorial went on to admire 'the splendid courage and equally splendid faith of the Viceroy' and assured him of 'complete confidence and prayers'. At the same time it paid 'tribute to the spirit of a people that willingly accept the hazards of law breaking for the sake of a cause they hold sacred' 33.

J. C. Kumarappa a very close associate of Gandhi appealed to Bishop Westcott urging him to protest against the repressive measures the British government took in suppressing the non-violent campaign under the leadership of Gandhi. His plea was that the Government might be persuaded to follow a non-violent method in meeting the situation of a non-violent movement<sup>34</sup>. In reply the Metropolitan declared unequivocally that the teaching or example of Jesus Christ did not encourage a civil disobedience movement, "what I protest against is that you should think that the teaching or example of Jesus Christ gives any warrant for the practice of civil disobedience".

But at the same time there were positive responses from Western missionaries. Six leading educational missionaries in North India published a statement in full support of Gandhi and his method. Apparently in opposition to Metropolitan Westcott they said: "if

33 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> The Guardian Vol.VIII, June 19, 1930: 297.

revolution is to be carried out at all, Mahatma Gandhi's method is at least as Christian as any that has been tried in the history of the world"<sup>36</sup>.

In 'Christianity and the New Social order', S.K. George dealt with the same theme. He said: "He (Gandhi) has realized the need for collective action, the inevitability of conflict to achieve higher social ends. He goes far beyond the Christian and the Groupist preachers in organizing resistance to collective injustice, but unlike the secularist the power with which he would challenge entrenched injustice is the power of the spirit, the power of love. That is the religious way of achieving world regeneration" <sup>37</sup>.

E.C. Dewick, a missionary recorded the range of opinions on Gandhi that existed among missionaries. Some regarded him as a 'disturber of the peace and an enemy of the British Empire', others held him with 'admiration or even veneration', 'as one who, albeit a non-Christian, was unquestionably a hero and saint of spiritual power and Christ-like character'. While one group qualified him just a Hindu another group called him 'almost a Christian', who might with discretion and sympathy be eventually gathered in to the fold of Church<sup>38</sup>. Then there were missionaries who did wish to see Gandhi adopt the Christian faith and persuaded him to do so.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> The Guardian Vol.VIII, July 3, 1930: 321-322.

S.K. George, <u>Gandhi's Challenge to Christianity</u> (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1960) 63.

E.C. Dewick, "Mahatma Gandhi and Christian Missions", NCCR Vol.LXII, No.6 June (1942): 235-241.

Stanley Jones towered over all others who actively sought to influence Gandhi to become a Christian. In spite of Gandhi's outspoken criticisms of Christian missions Stanley Jones regarded Gandhi as a Christian at heart. He recognised Gandhi being more faithful in following Christ's way than most Christians. He testified: "And yet a little man, who fought a system in the framework of which I stand has taught me more the spirit of Christ than perhaps any other man in East or West" Jones saw in Gandhi an example of what Indian Christianity in practice ought to be like.

Stanley Jones believed that Gandhi had a message and he was insistent that Christians as individuals needed to learn from him. To Jones Gandhi was deeply Christianised than most Christians<sup>40</sup>. Although not a professing Christian Gandhi went far beyond most of the Christians in manifesting the Christian spirit. Jones said "He may not have understood the death of Christ to the same depth as a Christian, but he applied the cross more deeply in his life" and went on to add:

"Never in human history has so much light have been shed on the cross as has been through this one man and that man not even called a Christian. Had not our Christianity been so vitiated and overlain by our identification with unchristian attitudes and policies in public and private life, we would have

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40 Ibid.: 70.

E. Stanley Jones, Mahatma Gandhi An Interpretation op.cit.: 10.

seen at once the kinship between Gandhi's method and the cross. Non-Christians saw it instinctively"<sup>41</sup>.

Gandhi was an unmistakable challenge to missions concerning their definition of the gospel and their criterion for deciding who is a Christian. In the following part a detailed survey of the responses of some prominent Christian personalities is attempted. For the sake of convenience those who actively responded are classified into Christians of Gandhi's inner circle meaning his close associates and fellow seekers and others.

#### 7.2.1 Christians of Gandhi's inner circle

## (i) C. F. Andrews

It was in South Africa that C.F. Andrews met Gandhi for the first time. Gandhi was then helping the Indian community which was the victim of racial discrimination. Andrews recorded his first impression as follows:

"In him, from the very first, I felt instinctively that there had come into the world, not only a new religious personality of the highest order, moving the hearts of man and women to incredible sacrifice, but also a new religious truth, which yet was not new, but old as the stars and the everlasting hills. His

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Ibid.

one message was that long-suffering and redeeming love is alone invincible"<sup>42</sup>.

While working with Gandhi and his followers in South Africa Andrews felt that they were taking the true Christian position: suffering (wrongdoing) patiently and overcoming evil by good. Two things struck Andrews; one was Gandhi's closeness to Christ and other was the prejudice of the so called Christians to him. Andrews wrote:

"Even when I was actively engaged in trying to help Mahatma Gandhi at the height of the strain of conflict I was subconsciously occupied in thinking out the spiritual meaning of his personality-so entirely Hindu, and yet supremely Christian" <sup>43</sup>.

Andrews was sad to observe how so many who professed themselves to be Christians and represented the Christian Church condemned Gandhi because he does not belong to the white race. Gandhi was even refused admission to church service because he was a coloured man. Andrews could not tolerate a "colour-ridden Christianity". Like St. Paul Andrews made up his mind to resist those who brought racialism inside Christian church. Without hesitation he said; "also I must recognise, without any reserve whatever, the spirit of

C.F. Andrews, What I Owe to Christ (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1932) 252.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> C.F. Andrews, What I Owe to Christ (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1932) 246-247.

Christ present in those who did not call themselves Christians. I had to stand on their side, and not with those who were keeping alive the spirit of racial and religious exclusion"<sup>44</sup>.

The difference in their background, which is too obvious, didn't divide Andrews and Gandhi, for those differences were only on the surface. There were deep elements of agreement in their attitude to life and its duties. They sprang from a common concern for the oppressed and downtrodden and a common faith in the ultimate power and reality of love. It had stood the test of much vehement disagreement over particular methods and policies, and the long separation had only drawn closer the bonds of confidence and trust<sup>45</sup>.

It was Gandhi's burning passion for serving the week and oppressed that bound Andrews to him. They both held that God was to be found among the lowliest child of the soil. The essential harmony between them sprang from their agreement on "practical religious ideals". As Gandhi said each was essentially a seeker and servant of humanity.

44 Ibid.: 257-258.

Benarsidas Chaturvedi & Marjorie Sykes, <u>Charles Freer Andrews</u> (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1982) 225.

#### (a) Andrews and Christian missionary work in India

Commenting on Gandhi's reservation about orthodox Christianity as presented to him by the missionaries C.F. Andrews wrote:

"The overlapping of Christian Missionary work by the forceful and pervasive environment of the British administration in India so that in many missionary stations there is very little outward sign of any distinction between the British civil rule and the Mission work- has led to a painful and almost universal confusion about the essential meaning of Christian Religion among the orthodox Hindus and Muhammadans" <sup>46</sup>.

This world entanglement, according to Andrews, betrayed the essential meaning of the Christian religion, and at the same time incapacitated many Christians from appreciating and accepting Gandhi's methods and its religious significance.

Andrews was very much exercised about the problem of how Christian evangelism be conceived in relation to non-Christian communities. His understanding of evangelism and conversion was closely related to his experience and understanding of Hinduism. When Andrews spoke of Hinduism, he saw it in the religion of his two friends Tagore and Gandhi. Like Gandhi, Andrews disliked the attitude

of superiority and religious exclusivism shown by some Christians. He felt that this approach was un-Christian and therefore, he condemned it strongly. More positively he saw the indubitable experience of the presence of the spirit of God among men who are not Christians<sup>47</sup>. Andrews wrote:

"If Christianity were to succeed it must not come forward as an antagonist and a rival to the great religious strivings of the past. It must come as a helper and a fulfiller, a peacemaker and a friend. There must no longer be the desire to capture converts from Hinduism, but to come to her aid in the needful time of trouble, and to help her in the fulfilment of duties she has long neglected" <sup>48</sup>.

Andrews was of the view that it is not by mere outward organisation or outward form of organised activity however successfully managed, shall Christian missions could reach the hearts of Indian people. He agreed fully with Susil Rudra and some other leading Indian Christians of Delhi who expressed the strong opinion that silent influence, carrying with it the fragrance of a true Christian life, was worth all the propagandist teaching in the world and the bloom of the rose does not need to proclaim itself loudly to the world. Its very perfume is the witness of its own sweetness. Andrews said; "a Christian life

46 <u>CWMG</u> Vol.71: 85.

Daniel O' Connor, ed. <u>The Testimony of C.F. Andrews</u> (Madras: CISRS&CLS, 1974) 39.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> Benarsidas Chaturvedi and Marjorie Sykes, op. cit.: 70.

that grows silently like the rose, shedding its perfume on every side, is the truest witness to Christ', <sup>49</sup>. The similarity to Gandhi's view is obvious.

Andrews believed with Gandhi that all Christians in general and the Christian missionaries in particular should lead a Christ-like life. A missionary's first duty, Andrews said, was not to preach, or teach or to heal in the name of Christ but to live in his spirit. Failure here meant failure all along the line. From the beginning of apostolic preaching the thing which lent the Gospel most force was the evident faith and the transformed characters of the preachers. It was the kind of life that Christians lived which led many men to inquire regarding Christian belief and persuaded them to accept it. It was a call to moral and spiritual change. The meaning of that change is demonstrated by the lives and not by words of Christians. "To be a Christian", he wrote; "means not the expression of an outward creed but the living of an inward life" <sup>50</sup>.

It is significant that Andrews dealt much on the practical aspects of religion and little on dogmas and creeds. He said:

"I have longed above all else to make known what Christ himself has made known to me. But this is rather sharing with one another the joy of religious experience than by imposing on anyone a religious dogma... Is not the ultimate thing needed for sharing any precious truth with another person just this-to keep

Benarsidas Chaturvedi & Marjorie Sykes, op.cit.: 114.

<sup>49</sup> C.F. Andrews, What I Owe to Christ op.cit.: 165 -166.

the inner light in one's own soul so pure that the truth shines through its own radiance? No truth worth knowing can ever be taught; it can only be lived"<sup>51</sup>.

#### (b) The message and the person of Jesus

Gandhi differed from Andrews on the question of the significance of Christ. Gandhi has made his position clear many times. For example he wrote: The difference in the perception of the significance of Jesus the person and Jesus the principle used to be a major dividing line between not only Gandhi and the missionaries, but also between him and the Christian friends and associates of his inner circle. Gandhi could never accept the precedence accorded to the divinity of the person of Jesus over his principles as expounded in the Sermon on the Mount and exemplified in his life <sup>52</sup>. "If Jesus represents not a person but the principle of non-violence India has accepted its protecting power," <sup>53</sup> he said. To him the personality of Jesus is important, but only as a beautiful example: To quote him again:

"The gentle figure of Christ, so patient, so kind, so loving, so full of forgiveness that he taught his followers not to retaliate when

C.F. Andrews, <u>The Sermon on the Mount</u> (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1949) 148-155.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Benarsidas Chaturvedi & Marjorie Sykes, op.cit.: 265.

Quoted in M.M. Thomas, <u>Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance</u> (Madras: CLS, 1991) 195-240.

abused or struck but to turn the other check it was a beautiful example, I thought of the perfect man"<sup>54</sup>.

Gandhi accepted Jesus as a martyr, an embodiment of sacrifice and the cross as a great example to the world. He confessed:

"Though I cannot claim to be a Christian in the sectarian sense, the example of Jesus' suffering is a factor in the composition of my underlying faith in non-violence which rules all my actions, worldly and temporal. Jesus lived and died in vain if he did not teach us to regulate the whole of life by the eternal law of love" <sup>55</sup>.

The historical person of Jesus was ultimately not very crucial to Gandhi's acceptance of him and his teachings. He said:

"I may say that I have never been interested in historical Jesus. I should not care if it was proved by some one that the man called Jesus never lived, and that what narrated in the Gospel was a figment of the writers imagination for the Sermon on the Mount would still be true to me".56.

Gandhi claimed that Jesus occupied in his heart the place of a great teacher, but Sermon on the Mount was the substance of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid

Quoted in M.M. Thomas, <u>Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance</u> (Madras: CLS, 1991) 202.

Christianity for him. To those who live the Sermon, the birth, death and continued presence of Christ are not historical but ever-recurring eternal events in the moral life of individuals engaged in sacrificial love.

On the other hand to Andrews the centre of his religious experience was an intense personal devotion to a living, human Christ. His prayers were intimate talks with a great companion vividly and warmly present at his side, the Jesus of the Gospels. Religion for him was not a system of speculative ideas, it was the experience of a transforming friendship, it was the source and counterpart of the affectionate devotion, which he lavished on his friends on earth; it was *bhakti*, and was content to let intellectual speculations to rest. He wrote:

"Christ has become for me in my moral and spiritual experience the living tangible expression of God. With regard to the infinitude of God that lies beyond this I seem able at this present stage of existence to know nothing that can be defined. But the human in Christ, that is also divine, I can really know; and when I see this divine beauty, truth and love in others also, it is natural for me to relate it to Christ".

Andrews saw the Sermon on the Mount not as an unpractical ideal, but as the most practical of all methods of overcoming evil in this world.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> Benarsidas Chaturvedi and Marjorie Sykes, op. cit.: 266-267.

Watching Gandhi in action helped Andrews to deepen his own understanding of Jesus' message. Towards the end of the twenty-one days Delhi fast undertaken in order to uphold Hindu-Muslim unity Andrews wrote:

"Instinctively my gaze turned back to the frail, wasted, tortured spirit on the terrace by my side, bearing the sins and sorrows of his people. With a rush of emotion there came to memory the passage from the Book of lamentation-"Is it nothing to you all ye that pass by? Behold and see, if there is any sorrow like unto my sorrow". And in that hour of vision I knew more deeply, in my own personal life, the meaning of the cross" 58.

Gandhi and Andrews believed that spirituality did not consist in turning away from poverty, injustice and ignorance but fully facing and fighting them. Both did not divorce spiritual life from practical life. According to Gandhi, Christ's life set before the whole world a great example of self-suffering love. Gandhi put this law of love into practice and demonstrated the potency and practicability of the method of Christ's cross in overcoming evil. Christ's principles proved more relevant to Gandhi. The human Christ captured Andrews' mind. To him it was in Christ that love of God and love of fellowmen became inseparably one. Wherever he found the oppressed and the weak there he found Christ, the Son of Man, suffering in each indignity offered to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> C.F. Andrews, Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas op.cit.: 313.

the least of his brethren; Christ the Divine head of humanity in whom all the races of mankind were gathered into one<sup>59</sup>.

When we compare these two perceptions of Jesus we are struck more by the fundamental convergence rather than by their apparent divergence.

### (c) On conversion

As we saw Gandhi always maintained that conversion in the sense of self-purification and self-realisation was vital for every religious community. An inner change of heart was the birth of true religion in everyone. Such an inner change was possible in every one irrespective of his faith. Conversion occurred when men became aware of a higher truth or a deeper spiritual value resulting in a moral crisis in life. It would be a rebirth in spirit. Conversion meant for Gandhi a 'greater surrender to God and greater self-purification'. Real conversion he said sprang from the heart and at the prompting of God, not on the persuasion of a stranger. Gandhi pleaded that the missionaries should aim at changing the lives of persons and not their religious labels. For the inner transformation of life, he believed, it was not necessary to discard one's own religious tradition, although one might benefit by the insights of the entire religious heritage of humanity.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> Daniel O' Connor, op.cit.: 185-186.

Gandhi welcomed the sharing of one's experience of truth with others. But he pointed out that this could not be in one direction only. He also believed that religions could best be propagated by the noble lives led by its followers. A life of service and simplicity was the best preaching. No other propaganda could match it. 'To live the Gospel', wrote Gandhi, 'is the most effective way... most effective in the beginning, in the middle and in the end'. Gandhi believed that the soul of every religion was one and all faiths together constitute a revelation of truth. As religion conceived by humankind was imperfect, equimindness would help to solve many difficulties. He felt that all people should remain in their own respective religious traditions and try to purify them from within whenever necessary. He would never support a non-Christian (say a Hindu) becoming a Christian but would ask the adherent to become a good Hindu rather than change his faith.

Andrews approved conversion under certain conditions but he exercised the most scrupulous care lest the influence of his own personality should lead any young man to become a Christian from any other motive than that of genuine religious experience and conviction. On the other hand where such genuine experience existed he would not deny the person the right to do so. And men who had learnt of Christ from him did from time to time, with his knowledge and support, seek baptism in the Christian Church. After a long discussion with Gandhi on this subject Andrews expressed his differences as follows:

"Your talks on religion yesterday distressed me, for its formula, all religions are equal did not seem to correspond with history or my own experience. Your declaration that a man should always remain in the faith in which he was born appeared to me not in consonance with such a dynamic subject as religion, of course, if conversion meant a denial of any living truth in ones own religion, then we must have nothing to do with it. But... it is rather the discovery of a new and glorious truth, for which one would sacrifice one's whole life. It does mean also, very often, passing from one fellowship to another; and this should never be done lightly...but if the new fellowship embodies the glorious new truth in such a way as to make it more living and real and cogent than the old out-worn truth, then I should say to the individual; Go forward"60.

Andrews continued: "... Christ is to me the unique way whereby I have come to God and have found God and I cannot help telling others about it wherever I can do so without any compulsion or undue influence... I feel, as a devout Christian, that the message, which Christ came into the world to proclaim, is the most complete and most inspiring that was ever given to man. That is why I am a Christian"<sup>61</sup>.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> Benarsidas Chaturvedi & Marjorie Sykes, op. cit.: 349.

Daniel O'Connor, op. cit.: 118-121.

At the same time, Andrews fully expected his friend Abdul Ghaffar Khan to make known the message of the prophet, which is to him a living truth that he cannot keep it to himself.

Also Andrews added we should not always be fighting as to whose 'gospel' is superior. He believed that there are clear-cut distinctions between Christians, Hindus and Muslims, which cannot be today over passed. But there are also a precious element of goodness, which all can hold in common. This seems to Andrews to be a fine way towards peace on religion, without any compromise, syncretism, or toning down of vital distinctions.

## (d) On reverence for other faiths

By his concept of reverence for all religions Gandhi did not mean that all religions were of equal value to every man, nor did he mean that a synthesis could be achieved by adding together the best elements of the different religious traditions. He believed that the principal religions of the world had their respective characteristics issuing forth from specific historical, geographical and cultural milieu. Hence he maintained that there ought not be any tinge of malice or hatred towards other religious traditions than one's own. Religions were given to mankind to accelerate the process of realisation of the fundamental unity of humanity. Each religion had its contribution to make to human evolution and was willed by God, according to Gandhi.

Gandhi was critical of Christianity because it lacked openness and humility. What was practised in the west, he believed, were departures from the simple teachings of Jesus. In Europe he saw the domineering sway of Christian church and not the human, gentle and God-like way of Jesus. It taught more theology but lived less gospel of Christ. He could not accept missionary's intolerant attitude to other religions and their claim on exclusive possession of truth. But it was his conviction that an undogmatic Christianity true to the spirit of Jesus could yet discover and establish links with the noble elements in all religions.

Andrews suggested that for any one who wished to take other religions seriously the following precept of St. Paul in Philippines 4: 8-10 would be helpful:

"Finally, brethren What ever is true, What ever is honourable, What ever is just, What ever is pure, What ever is lovely, What ever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things... the God of peace will be with you".

Andrews further said that if we approached Islam or Hinduism or the religion of the Buddha, or Confucius in this spirit (of St. Paul) we should not fail to find very much indeed with which the Christians could truly sympathise. For it was a fundamental Christian belief that God was the father of mankind and that He loved all his human

children with an equal and impartial love<sup>62</sup>. To reinforce this very simple position, which had been strangely overlooked by many who went out to missionary work, the words of St. Peter could be a good reminder: "Truly I perceived that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him". (Acts: 10:34)

In short Andrews was of the view that it was not by mere profession of God's name that man should find acceptance, but rather by living in His spirit. No outward profession of a creed had any value for Him apart from the inner faith. Hypocrisy was felt by Christ to be one of the most deadly sins, and the profession of a religion without practice was the form of hypocrisy that he challenged most of all. Following Christ's precepts, Andrews was in full agreement with Gandhi in maintaining that a truly religious life was living its message and doing the will of God by serving others. It never divided mankind but unified it.

# (ii) S. K. George

S. K. George was a teacher in Bishop's College Calcutta before he became an ardent follower of Gandhi. His serious involvement in the national struggles for Indian Independence dated from his publication in 1932 of his manifesto entitled **India in Travail**. George was compelled to resign his teaching position in the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> Daniel O'Connor, op.cit. : 216.

college after this. Gandhi's life and message gripped him and Metropolitan Foss Westcott of Calcutta who considered Gandhi's methods un-Christian disfavoured his open support to Gandhi's position. George's remark "the fact of Gandhi is not only a challenge but an aid to faith" summarised well his position towards Gandhi and the struggle led by him.

George argued that, a true Christian in India today must necessarily be a Gandhian. He said so because the term Christian is to be understood in its widest, and truest sense, a sense in which Gandhi today was giving a practical demonstration of the applicability of the teachings of Jesus, the Master, to modern problems<sup>64</sup>. "Not to recognise that application in Gandhi's mighty experiments with truth, not to see in him the stirrings of the spirit of God, is to be lacking in spiritual discernment, is to come under the condemnation of Jesus himself for not discerning the signs of the times and the ways of God"<sup>65</sup>.

S. K. George believed that the central thing in Christianity is the hope of the kingdom of God and that the Lord Jesus is inviting us to carry on the building up of that kingdom with devotion and in the spirit which characterised himself in his life upon earth. 'Doctrinal affiliations have always seemed to me of less importance than

<sup>63</sup> S.K. George, op.cit.: xiii.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> Ibid: x.

<sup>65</sup> S.K. George, op.cit. : xi-xii.

devotions to the ideal of the kingdom' 66 wrote George. He believed that the spirit of God was moving mightily to establish the foundations of the kingdom of God in the land of India. For the church with its commitments, its alliances with vested interests, its natural conservatism and, unfortunately in India with its foreign leadership, was not to be expected to welcome such a radical thing as the kingdom of God coming in power, particularly when God's chosen agent for it happened to be one outside its own fold 67. It was George's conviction that Mahatma Gandhi was a worker for the kingdom of God, perhaps the greatest force working for it here or anywhere else. George was convinced that Gandhi was a man of God and that the greatest duty of any Christian or of any God fearing man was to stand with him for the realisation of truth and justice and true brotherhood between men of all classes and creeds and races.

George's challenge was extended to Christian orthodoxy when he called upon his fellow Indian Christians not to accept as final the formulations of doctrines evolved in the west in utter ignorance of the treasures of the spirit garnered in the East. He said; an Indian Christianity, true alike to its Christian and its Indian heritage, will I trust, open its doors wide to welcome and include all those who seek to worship God in spirit and in truth and to walk the way of Jesus in all humility<sup>68</sup>.

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<sup>66 &</sup>lt;u>THE FFT QUARTERLY</u> op.cit. : 3.

<sup>67 &</sup>lt;u>THE FFT QUARTERLY</u> op.cit.: 4.

S.K. George, op.cit. xii-xiii.

George in the book <u>Gandhi's Challenge to Christianity</u> wrote: "The Church in India will embody Christ to India only in the measure in which it takes upon itself the sufferings of its people. For redemptive suffering love is the central principle in Christianity and the manifestation of it in practice, and not the preaching of any dogma is what is needed, is what will convince India of the truth and the power of Christianity"<sup>69</sup>.

One of the main themes of George's book is that Gandhian *Satyagraha* is Christianity in action and that the Christian Church lost one of its greatest opportunities in recent years in failing to fall behind Gandhi in his great movement for national emancipation on non-violent lines. He said: "Not to recognise in him the greatest ally of essential Christianity in India, the greatest worker for the kingdom of God in the world today, is to betray gross inability to discern the working of God's spirit. To seek to condemn him as an enemy and to forbid him to prophesy because he followed not us, because he does not accept the Church's version of Christianity, is to judge him, not by his fruits, but by his label; and might even mean being found fighting against God''<sup>70</sup>.

George laboured hard to show how Gandhi's *satayagraha* was an aid to Christianity. It was an aid because Gandhi interpreted most

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid. : xiv.

S.K. George, op.cit. : xv.

faithfully the philosophy of the Gospels<sup>71</sup>, it was the method Gandhi evolved for the realisation of the kingdom<sup>72</sup>, it made the cross a working principle of conquering love and overcoming evil everywhere<sup>73</sup>. George had the distinctive merit of being one of the first Indian Christian theologian who have grasped the significance of the *satyagraha* struggle as a contemporary manifestation of the spirit of Jesus and God.

## (a) On the role of Christian missions in India

On the role of Christian missions in India George's plea was for 'the real assimilation of Christian Gospel into the religious heritage of India'<sup>74</sup>. On Christian missionary work George shared Gandhi's dictum; that religious missions must, like Caesar's wife, be above suspicion. There should not be any ulterior motive in Christian service rendered to others. He explained this idea further as follows:

"If missionaries from the west with their specialised training and aptitudes are willing to serve India without ulterior motive of adding to the numerical strength of the denominations they belong to they will be truly representative of their Master and be doing their best to win for Him the heart of India. We have come across a few such who find in

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> Ibid.: 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> Ibid.: 9.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> Ibid.: 24.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> Ibid: 41.

disinterested service to India their true reward, who have been taken into the hearts of the people. We wish Christianity in India to become truly Indian and religions of India to come together in genuine co-operation giving a lead to the nations in peaceful co-existence"<sup>75</sup>.

On the issue of missionary work in independent India George said that missions have to shun all western missionary methods and motives which on the whole failed to understand Indian situation. Missionary propaganda aroused in many quarters opposition because it was not always on a spiritual plane or provoked by the spirituality of its message. Christian missions in India should rethink its message and readjust its methods. In the teaching and in the person of Gandhi a *sanatani* Hindu, George believed, Indian Christianity and Christian missions met a greater challenge, a challenge alike to its spirituality and its ethics. So they should emulate his example to be relevant in the Indian context, exhorted George.

To George evangelization was sharing, sharing to the full and the uttermost. His criticism against European missionaries in India was that in spite of their great sacrifices they stopped short of the last step of complete identification with the people whom they came out to serve. The Christian doctrine of incarnation enshrined the true principle of real redemptive spiritual service as that of unreserved self-giving. George believed that it was these principles of complete

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THE FFT QUARTERLY op.cit.: 85-86.

identification with the people whom we served that have to be practised in the missionary work in India. He concluded by saying: "Living side by side with them, sharing in their manual labours, accepting their limitations as for as they are God- ordained, these are essential to the life-giving work of the Christian missionary in India"<sup>76</sup>.

## (b) Views on Christ

George's views on Christ were largely similar to those of Gandhi. A few Christians who became close followers of Gandhi subscribed to the view of giving precedence to the precepts of Christ over the person of Christ. Like Gandhi George too gave priority to principles over the person. J.C. Kumarappa for example in his book <a href="Person-Practice and Precepts of Jesus">Practice and Precepts of Jesus</a> attempted to present the teachings of Jesus shorn of all doctrinal affiliations. For instance:

"As the word "Christian" itself had lost all association with the life and example set by Jesus I have advisedly styled in this pamphlet all those who follow precepts such as the ones Jesus taught "followers of Jesus", be they Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists or, perchance even "Christians", irrespective of their own religious affiliations".

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T.K. Thomas, ed. <u>The Witness of S.K. George</u> (Madras: CISRS&CLS, 1970)

J.C. Kumarappa, <u>Practice and Precepts of Jesus</u> (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House) X.

George accepted Christ as a historical person. For him Christ was a stupendous fact in the spiritual history of man, in the story of human evolution <sup>78</sup>. George gave a new interpretation to Christ's divinity. Christ was a human fact primarily not a divine one, a divine fact only through being, first and last, a human one. (Infact George believed Gandhi himself was such a spiritual fact like Jesus.) To the question: Who was Jesus? George would answer that he was a man among other men and greater and wiser than others and that he was divine precisely to the extent he spent himself for others and, therefore, a man with a perennial message for mankind. He said:

"The story of God's revelation to man, as recorded in the Bible reaches its culmination in Jesus of Nazareth.... Progress in religion is achieved through an ever deepening and growing discrimination between the essentials and non-essentials in man's apprehension of, and response to, the Divine... In Jesus of Nazareth, especially in his death on the cross, this development reached a simplification and an intensity which justifies the ecstatic utterance of a modern poet: In the cross of Christ I glory, Towering O'er the wrecks of time; All the light of sacred story Gathers round its head sublime".

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> S.K. George, op. cit.: 3.

S.K. George, <u>The Story of the Bible</u> (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1959) 154-155.

## (c) Meaning of the cross

The cross was all important in George's thinking. It was Gandhi's interpretation that deepened George's understanding of the cross. He started viewing the cross in terms of Gandhian *satyagraha*. All other events in the life of Jesus were for him of secondary importance. The signs and miracles, the claims that Jesus made for himself, the resurrection and the claims of Jesus' followers for him were all inessential. The cross, in George's thinking, overshadowed the Christ. And the cross itself was understood primarily as an example and a symbol, and not as an event. In George's understanding it stood for the supreme exemplification of the concept of vicarious suffering. It proved that the ideals enshrined in the Sermon on the Mount could be put in to practice and this was its sole significance. George did not attach any unique saving virtue to the cross of Christ. He wrote:

"The Cross of Christ is the supreme, perfect historic example of such assault and victory of love over evil. But, alas, Christianity has made of it a creed, a doctrine, belief in which is to secure a heaven of comfort and security! It was necessary to bring it back from the realm of creed and dogma and set it up again as a working principle of life, still mighty to overthrow entrenched evil and still possible to be lived out. That is what has been achieved by one who does not profess

himself to be a Christian, but in whom the central Christian principle of the Cross has been again incarnated itself<sup>\*,80</sup>.

George wanted Christian church to produce young men and women with passion for unselfish service and a burning love for humanity, to feed, to clothe and to teach those famishing all around them, unloved and uncared for. This was, according to him, what salvation must involve. Also it meant to add the fragrance of a heavenly life and to bring to it all the inspiration of an unearthly love. And this love was to be added to the common human love of brethren because of our common humanity. George believed that this common human love was obscured and often vitiated by the desire to proselytise. He asked Christians to dispel the odium of proselytization by positively discouraging conversion. Here also he fully shared Gandhi's position.

India has a long record of spiritual quest and realisation. The pathways of the spirit, the disciplines or *sadhanas* for self-realisation, have been mapped and marked out by yogis and *rishis* of India with thoroughness and elaboration unequalled in any other religion. George pointed out that, Christianity may indeed have much to learn from this search and realisation. What Christianity needed to do was to find its own place among the systems or *margas* recognised by a religion that

S.K. George, <u>The Story of the Bible</u> (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1959) 23.

was far more truly catholic than any form of Christianity. Hence George' wish was of a Christianity that finds its place and keeps its distinctive flavour and fragrance within the framework of Indian religion. Christianity in an independent India might yet find its rightful place within Indian religion, might yet become truly Indian without ceasing to be Christian.

George said the vision that really enthrals him is beyond the walls of churches and temples. George concluded thus:

"People coming out of the stifling atmosphere of the so called houses of God and meeting Him face to face in the broad open spaces of the world, amid toils and suffering of a humanity that is striving to realise the kingdom of God on earth. Hindu, Muslim and Christian, indeed men and women of good will of all religions and of no religion, can unite to achieve and maintain peace and justice on earth. That to me will be fulfilling of Christianity, of Religion in India and the world at large".

George was a visionary and dreamed a day when Christianity in India will no longer be a warring creed fighting against other religions, but a partner with them all in realising peace and goodwill among men<sup>82</sup>. That, according to George, would be the beginning of Christianity's answer to the challenge of Gandhi.

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THE FFT QUARTERLY op. cit.: 37-38.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid: 96.

# (iii) E. Stanley Jones

E. Stanley Jones, the world renowned American evangelist, had been a great sympathiser of the Gandhian movement. His admiration for Gandhi arose from the intimate similarity that he saw between his master Jesus and the man Gandhi. He wrote: "...he (Gandhi) marched into the soul of humanity in the most triumphal march that any man ever made since the death and resurrection of the Son of God". Jones admitted that Gandhi taught him more about the spirit of Christ than perhaps any other man in East, or West<sup>84</sup>, and on the occasion of Gandhi's martyrdom Jones said: "Never did a death more fittingly crown a life, save only one-that of the Son of God".

The first meeting between Stanley Jones and Gandhi took place in 1919 when Jones was at St. Stephen's College, Delhi to address the students. Susil Rudra, the Principal, introduced him to Gandhi. It was followed by a conversation about how Christianity could be naturalised in India<sup>86</sup>. Jones was impressed by Gandhi's faithfulness to the moral ideal of Christ and remarked: Gandhi went by manifesting a Christian spirit far beyond most of the Christians<sup>87</sup>.

Jones's next meeting with Gandhi was in Poona in 1924. That was when Gandhi was temporarily released from the jail for an

E. Stanley Jones, <u>Mahatma Gandhi An Interpretation</u> op.cit.: 19.

Ibid.: 10.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.: 51.

S. Radhakrishnan, ed. <u>Mahatma Gandhi: 100 years</u> (New Delhi: Gandhi Peace Foundation, 1968) 172-173.

operation. Jones asked for a message he could take back with him to the west as to how we should live this Christian life? Gandhi replied: "Such a message cannot be given by word of mouth; it can only be lived". Though this reply impressed Jones, the evangelist in Jones persuaded Gandhi that he ought to make Christ the centre of his non-violent movement for it could then readily appreciated by the west. "If you will give a clear-cut witness to Jesus, then a world kingdom is awaiting you". Also Jones wanted Gandhi to declare a personal allegiance to Christ, though he added that he did not mean coming out and being a baptised Christian. He left that for Gandhi to decide. But to the disappointment of Jones, Gandhi did neither.

## (a) From person to principle or vice-versa

Jones admiration of Gandhi was not uncritical. He viewed every word and every deed of Gandhi from a strictly Christian-evangelical point of view and critiqued them. Jones was provoked by Gandhi's speech in the missionaries' meet in Calcutta YWCA where he said: "Hinduism, as I know, entirely satisfies my soul, fills my whole being, and I find solace in the *Bhagavadgita* and the *Upanishads* that I miss even in the Sermon on the Mount". In the above words Jones sensed a serious weakness in Gandhi's understanding of Christ and was disappointed about it He wrote:

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E.Stanley Jones, op.cit.: 71.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.: 93.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>90</sup> Young India August 6, 1925.

"I think you have grasped certain principles of the Christian faith which have moulded you and have helped make you great-you have grasped the principles, but you have missed the person. You said in Calcutta to the missionaries that you did not turn to the Sermon on the Mount for consolation, but to the *Bhagavadgita*. Nor do I turn to the Sermon on the Mount for consolation, but to this person who embodies and illustrates the Sermon on the Mount, but he is much more. Here is where I think you are weakest in your grasp. May I suggest that you penetrate through the principles to the person and then come back and tell us what you have found. I don't say this as a mere Christian propagandist. I say this because we need you and need the illustration you could give us if you really grasp the centre the person" <sup>91</sup>.

The point raised by Jones regarding the precedence to be accorded to the person of Jesus was not new to Gandhi. But he stuck to his position that Jesus was one among the great teachers of the world and his life inspired him as an embodiment of sacrifice.

# (b) Contextualsing the meaning of 'Christian': Gandhi's influence

By his contact with Gandhi and numerous Hindus of high standing Jones drew the insight that Christian faith could define in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>91</sup> E.Stanley Jones, op. cit.: 75.

terms of Christ and his moral content. The term Christianity represented for him all the doctrinal interpretation and ritual tradition which Christians had developed since the time of Jesus and which was embodied in the institution of the church. To Jones, however, to belong to this church or in one of its denominations and to have inherited the tradition was less important compared with a personal encounter with Christ. His emphasis was on sharing or living the person of Christ than preaching or teaching any Christian dogma or tradition. In his book The Christ of the Mount he wrote:

"Among the many things that India has taught me are two outstanding: first, she compelled me to disentangle Christ from the accretions which the centuries had gathered around Him. It was a liberating experience to find one's faith becoming simplified and centred in a person. For years I have walked in that liberty; but for several years there has been an undertone of questioning, and rather troubled questioning. The question was this: yes, Christ is the centre and to be a Christian is to catch His mind and His spirit, but what main content should be in those words-Christ, Christian? It is not enough to have the words. The deeper question concerns the content that is to be in the words. For the content varies and varies vitally. So India has taught me the second thing: the

main moral content in the word Christian must be the Sermon on the Mount"<sup>92</sup>.

These words were written after Jones had led some studies in the Sermon on the Mount. He saw that in the minds of Hindus particularly, the standard by which they judged Christians was the Sermon on the Mount. They were not interested in the historic Christian creeds. For them a Christian was one who followed the ideal set out by Jesus in the sermon<sup>93</sup>. To put it in another way to be a Christian was to be 'Christ-like', In Jones' choice of the Sermon on the Mount as his guide in defining for India the content of who and what was Christian clearly showed the influence of Gandhi and other Hindus he encountered.

Gandhi advised Indian Christians to avoid the pitfalls of western Christianity and stick to the Sermon on the Mount instead<sup>95</sup>. Gandhi believed that he was trying to follow the precepts set out in the Sermon on the Mount. This was clear from what he said at a meeting with Christians in the Colombo (Sri Lanka) YMCA. "If ... I had only to face the Sermon on the Mount and my own interpretation of it, I should not hesitate to say, "oh yes, I am a Christian". But he could not do so,

E. Stanley Jones, <u>The Christ of the Mount</u> (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1931) 11.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

E. Stanley Jones, <u>The Christ of the Indian Road</u> (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1926) 82.

<sup>95 &</sup>lt;u>CWMG</u> Vol. 21: 168.

because what passes as Christianity was a negation of the Sermon on the Mount, 96.

When Jones asked Gandhi in 1919 what could be done so that, Christianity became naturalised in India, Gandhi's answer was that all Christians, missionaries and all must begin to live more like Jesus Christ. Living the life of Christ, to Gandhi, meant following the ideals set by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Jones too had accepted Gandhi's use of the Sermon on the Mount to define the Christian ideal. However, he had difficulties in reducing his Christian faith entirely to the level of an ideal as expounded in the Sermon. Although he called Gandhi a natural Christian Jones maintained that: "Mahatma Gandhi was a Hindu-a deeply Christianised Hindu, more Christianised than most Christians, and I was a Christian, at least a Christian-in-the-making".

"Mahatma didn't see the person of Christ as the real Christian does. He was dim at that place. But certain principles of the Sermon on the Mount did grip him, and he forthwith put them in to practice-overcoming evil with good, hate by love. In the practice of these principles he discovered and lived by the person of Christ, however dimly and unconsciously...He discovered a dim Christ through the deed, and we discover a

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D.G.Tendulkar, MAHATMA- Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi Vol.II (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1990) 294.

<sup>97</sup> S.Radhakrishnan, Mahatma Gandhi: 100 years op.cit.: 171.

dim Christ through the doctrine. We can only discover the real Christ through the doctrine and the deed"<sup>98</sup>.

Jones wanted Gandhi to experience a personal encounter with Christ and give a witness to him. He firmly believed Gandhi was missing heart revelation because he had not come into vital contact with the person Christ. Gandhi had only touched the person at second hand through the principles. To Jones it was at this point that a true Christian went beyond Gandhi.

Self-surrender to Christ, certainty of release from past and present sin and sharing this experience and faith with others as part of Christian vocation were the points which Gandhi could not accept. Gandhi was once asked what he thought of Jones in relation to his views on the above question. "He is a very earnest man, and a very sincere man, but he is too certain about religion and therefore lacks humility" Jones thought that the root cause of this difference was difference between Gandhi's experience as a Hindu and his own as a Christian.

### (c) Views on conversion

Gandhi's greatest influence on missionary thinking in India was focused on the question of religious conversion-its nature and its validity. Gandhi's position on conversion has already been discussed in

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.: 76.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>98</sup> E. Stanley Jones, <u>Mahatma Gandhi An Interpretation</u> op.cit.: 99.

detail. He dialogued with Jones on this sensitive question. Jones was of the view that the crucial thing in conversion was a transformation of character. Jones regarded conversion in the sense of a moral and spiritual transformation as necessary if one's religious faith was to enhance and enrich one's life. He believed that Christ was the only way for such a personal experience and the fulfilment of the religious cravings of the individuals <sup>100</sup>.

At the same time Jones agreed with those who were opposed to proselytizing and the mass exodus of Harijans' to Christianity. In Christ of the Indian Road he stated clearly his opposition to the idea of gaining mere members for the Church 101. In Christ at the Round Table he distinguished between horizontal and vertical conversions. The former were a mere change from one religion to another, leaving the person on the same level of character and life while the latter involved a spiritual change wrought by Christ that lifts one from sin to goodness, from discord to harmony, from selfishness to sacrifice, and from ourselves to God. Jones, therefore, was not in favour of allowing 'horizontal' conversions to Christianity unless 'vertical' conversion had taken place. In other words, no one could be baptised or claimed as a convert without there being evidence of a change of character in the direction of Christ-likeness 102.

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E. Stanley Jones, Along the Indian Road (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1939) 27.

E.Stanley Jones, <u>Christ of the Indian Road</u> op.cit.: 66.

E. Stanley Jones, <u>Christ at the Round Table</u> (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1928) 70-72.

It is clear, thus, that on the question of conversion Gandhi and Jones shared the same views on many points. Their open exchange of views and dialogue were, of course, mutually beneficial. But more significantly it promoted a deeper introspection in the Christian mission circles paving the way for adopting a more sensible and tolerant approach.

### (d) On the role of missions' humanitarian work

Gandhi took serious exceptions to the missionaries using philanthropic work as an aid to proselytizing. According to him religion was a deeply a personal matter, it touched the heart. So he asked, why should one change his religion because a doctor who professed Christianity as his religion had cured a him or why should a doctor expect or suggest such a change to a patient who was under his influence <sup>103</sup>? If conversion was to occur at the instance of missionaries the methods used must be like Caesar's wife above suspicions, he had said. He had told the missionaries bluntly that many of their conversions were only so called because the appeal had gone not to the heart but to the stomach <sup>104</sup>. Opposed as he was to any proselytizing, his protest was particularly focussed on what he regarded as the 'unspiritual mass conversions' of the untouchables. Gandhi knew that they possessed a very poor level of understanding religious intricacies

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C. Frimodt Moller, "Mr. Gandhi and Medical Missions", NCCR Vol.LI, No.6 June (1931): 298-302.

<sup>104</sup> CWMG Vol. 23: 220.

and therefore, their conversion could only be for material gain. Gandhi welcomed the humanitarian activities for the Harijans' but insisted that there was to be no preaching with it and no desire to convert them. He said: "faith is not imparted like secular subjects. It is given through the language of the heart. If a man has a living faith in him, it spreads its aroma like the rose its scent" <sup>105</sup>.

On this issue Jones held a different view. He believed that missionary institutions such as schools and hospitals were worthwhile in themselves whether they produced converts or not 106. Whereas for Gandhi a doctor's selfless service was sufficient by itself to communicate the spirit of Christ, Jones clearly believed it was also necessary for the Christian doctor to preach about Christ. The missionaries' words and their lives were both necessary just as they went together in the ministry of Jesus 107. Nevertheless, Gandhi's analogy of the rose struck a definite chord with Jone's own conception of evangelism. Words were important as a means of expressing it, but if there was no evident experience of Christ in the life of the Christian the words were empty he maintained. So in Gandhi's criticism of Indian Christians and missionaries Jones saw a confirmation of what he had maintained all along and said:

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Young India April 23,1931.

E.Stanley Jones, "Two Open Letters to Gandhi", NCCR Vol. LI, No. 5 May (1931): 271.

E. Stanley Jones, Mahatma Gandhi An Interpretation op. cit.: 78.

"For very, very often our evangelism has been verbal instead of vital-an evangelism of the lips instead of an evangelism of the life. The whole life has not spoken the message. Because we could say certain phrases, we thought we were preaching the gospel-but deep hasn't spoken to deep. It hasn't been self-verifying with the witness of the life corroborating the witness of the words. In penance for this we might very well impose a silence upon our lips until our lives have caught up with their testimony" 108.

Jones believed that Gandhi had a message for the world, and Christians as individuals needed to learn from him. Also there was an implied criticism of Christians in Jone's statement that, 'Gandhi was more christianised than most Christians'. Although not a professing Christian, Gandhi went far beyond most of the rest of the Christians in manifesting a Christian spirit. Jones said, Gandhi may not have understood the depth of Christ to the same depth as a Christian, but he applied the cross of the Christ more deeply in his life.

Gandhi's fasts helped India to understand the meaning of the cross because he suffered for the wrongs of others. After the famous 'fast unto death' on behalf of the untouchables Jones asked Gandhi whether his fasting was not a form of coercion i.e., violence. But Gandhi replied that it was the same kind of coercion, which Jesus

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>108</sup> E. Stanley Jones, <u>Mahatma Gandhi An Interpretation</u> op. cit.: 77-78.

exercised upon you from the cross<sup>109</sup>. In 1925 at Sabarmati Gandhi fasted for seven days because he found out that two of the boys in the Ashram were found guilty of sexual misconduct. He explained his reason thus; being the chief among the teachers, I had to take the punishment, on myself in the form of fasting". Then he forgave them. His comment afterwards was; if I am to identify myself with the grief of the least in India...let me identify myself with the sins of the little one under my care. Recounting the incident Jones wrote:

"He was never more Christ like than in those seven days of identifying himself with the sins of the little ones under his care. Identifying himself with the sins of the little ones under his care-that is the meaning of the cross. That is what God did; God was in Christ, reconciling the world into himself. To reconcile he had to bear our own sins in His own body on a tree. That is the supreme identification" 110.

Jones went to the extent of witnessing that Gandhi, in his life (though not by profession) bore witness to Christ and the cross as every disciple of Christ ought. He didn't see all the truth but he acted on what he saw<sup>111</sup>. He showed the new power that lay hidden in the cross and that it was possible to put the Sermon on the Mount into practice. Now having seen Gandhi a fallible human being acting like

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E. Stanley Jones, Along the Indian Road op. cit.: 144.

E. Stanly Jones, <u>Mahatma Gandhi An Interpretation</u> op. cit.: 136.

E. Stanly Jones, Mahatma Gandhi An Interpretation op. cit.: 98

Christ upon cross there was no excuse for Christians. It did pose an unavoidable challenge to Christians. No naturalisation of Christ would be complete unless Jesus' character and example were reproduced in the lives of Christians to the same extent as they had been in Gandhi's. Thus Gandhi, a Hindu, was nevertheless for Jones a pioneer of Indian Christianity.

C. F. Andrews, S. K. George and Stanley Jones who were Gandhi's close Christian friends were in full agreement that Gandhi had manifested in his life a true Christliness. They said that they themselves and the Christian world as a whole were enriched by Gandhi's practical application of the Christian principles. They emphasised that living like Christ-in other words imitation of Christwas more important than preaching or teaching of any Christian dogmas or traditions. Coming under Gandhi's influence they modified their traditional views and challenged Christians to give more importance to practical aspects of religion rather than mere dogmas or creed. They firmly believed that Gandhi posed an un-mistakable challenge before the Christian world as he was more Christianised than many who claimed to be Christians and his precepts were really valid for Christianity for its healthy conduct in a pluralistic context.

# 7.3 Three contemporary witnesses

The core of the message of Gandhi to the Christian missions was that they should live the message of Jesus rather than do

preaching. A close examination of the activities of Christian missions in contemporary India would convince one that Christian evangelical mission groups and organisations are not very keen in living the message of Jesus but are content simply with preaching it with an intention to convert. They have not given Gandhi's advice a chance; they seem to have almost totally ignored it. However, this approach is not common to all mission groups. The aggressive evangelization as practised by most of the mission groups active in North India is not accepted and followed by certain other mission groups and individuals. They feel, and have made it public, that conversion is not and shall not, constitute the central objective of Christian mission work. They acknowledge and follow the Gandhian advice and remind us that the best way to propagate the message of Jesus is to live it, to practice it in one's life to the extent possible and refrain from loud preaching. In order to illustrate this three cases are reported very briefly to show that the message of selfless love and service preached and practised by Jesus would spread like the fragrance of the rose provided one became a living example.

### 7.3.1 Maria Sadanam

The first example is the work of a young couple Santhosh Joseph and Mini living near Pala in Kottayam district, Kerala. They started a house for mentally ill called Maria Sadanam in 1998. On the occasion of their engagement they took a vow to adopt and take care of at least one destitute as a thanksgiving offering in return for God's

immense mercy. Santhosh says that the Bible is the prime source of their inspiration to start the home for the mentally ill. They brought a mentally deranged person wandering in the streets of Pala, their nearest town and accommodated him in their house and that was the humble beginning of Maria Sadanam. Now they house 210 inmates. Santhosh and his family-now the couple have three children-live with these sick and unwanted people. Santhosh testifies that they depend solely on God for all their needs and that God is their unfailing guide in all circumstances. The house is inter-religious in the true sense of the term. There is no focus on the religions of the inmates. Though the promoters were and continue to be inspired by Jesus, they never harbour thought of conversion. Though a Christian order of worship is held in the house, there is no compulsion on anybody to attend it. There is no restriction on practising one's own religion if any one wants to do so. Santhosh says that he never seeks funds from any church or religious Organisations. People from different religions help him generously. Santhosh testifies that the success of Maria Sadanam is the result of teamwork. They are twelve in number. Santhosh request the visitors not to highlight his activities but to focus on the inmates and let society know about their plight.

The service by the couple and the team of co-workers has silently inspired many people to offer generous contribution to the house both in cash and kind. Similarly the model has also inspired some to start similar centres. There are nine such centres doing similar

work in the surrounding districts kindling a corroborative response. Gandhi's argument that living the message of Jesus is more important than preaching it is amply validated through the example of this young couple and individuals and missions doing similar work.

### 7.3.2 Daivadan Centre

The second example is drawn from the work of Fr. Abraham Kaipanplackal a nanogerenarian Catholic priest of Chethimattom near Pala in Kottayam district of Kerala. He started his philanthropic activities in 1959 by opening a house for street boys called Boys Town. Till 1975 he opened ten such institutions in different parts of the state of Kerala. Due to differences with Fr. Kaipanplackal, the church authorities took over his Boys Town. Fr. Kaipanplackal could not subscribe to the disciplines and restrictions imposed upon him by the church. He was liberal in his outlook and followed the method of equal respect for all religions, particularly when it came to the organisation of the Boys town. Therefore, in August 15, 1977 he started an independent organisation called Ozanam Charitable Society to carry on his work in the true Christian spirit as he understood it and opened a home for the aged and the destitute. The Society grew into a large organisation and is working solely on the contributions from well wishers. No foreign funding agency or Churches support it financially. There are six such homes in different parts of Kerala under the organisation. The Pala home called Deivadan Centre now accommodates 550 inmates. Fr. Kaipanplackal says more than 1000 people have been benefited by the service of these centres and were returned to their homes. People belonging to different religions are accepted here. There is no compulsion whatever to follow Christian beliefs or practices. There is no room for conversion in the work. Fr. Kaipanplackal makes it known that true Christian spirit calls upon one to serve needy-the destitute particularly selflessly. There is a team of dedicated brothers and sisters to carry on the activities in the homes. When asked what was the motivating spirit behind his works he answered: "Jesus himself has commanded to love one another and by loving the poor and the rejected one is serving God. Fr. Kaipanplackal says, Christians are called to practice the selfless love exemplified in the ministry of Jesus". In these words of Fr. Kaipanplackal one clearly hears the echo of the words of Gandhi. This proves again that one can practice the precepts of Jesus without preaching them or trying to convert.

# 7.3.3 Oddanchatram Fellowship

The third example of a true Christian model of service as taught by Jesus and supported by Gandhi and relevant in India is the medical work in Oddanchatram near Dindigul–Tamil Nadu started and guided by Dr. A.K. Tharien. Tharien and the small prayer group at the Medical Collage decided to dedicate their lives for rural medical service in any one of the remotest villages of this country. Inspired by Gandhi's ideals Dr. Tharien reached Oddanchatram a very needy rural area to start work among the villagers in 1955. Dr. Jacob Cherian and Dr. Mary Cherian joined him later. Hygienic condition in the villages was miserable in those days. The dreaded diseases-tuberculosis and

leprosy-were common among the villagers. By the hard and dedicated work of the doctors and some Christian workers a clinic was opened there which has now grown up into a renowned institution, called Christian Fellowship Hospital. There are more than 80 doctors now in the hospital. The doctors and others work on a moderate salary. Service to the poor is their prime motive. They have opted not to receive any foreign assistance. Dr. Tharien is of the view that our foundations must be in India. Any special help for special equipment to improve the hospital service was accepted. However, the buildings and other facilities are financed in India itself.

In 1965 they started a leprosy rehabilitation centre at Amblikai near Oddanchatram. Dr. Jacob Cherian popularly known as Aiya is coordinating the activities of the centre. At present there are 40 inmates in the centre. In order to combat the spread of the decease Dr. Jacob Cherian and his team visit the nearby villages everyday and conduct medical camps. They have such camps in 39 villages in and around Ambilikai. Nearly 1,50,000 people are benefited by the activities of Dr. Jacob Cherian and his team. The death rate due to leprosy has been brought down considerably i.e., 5 in 10,000. They never seek to preach Christ or convert any one to Christianity. They depend solely on God and on goodwill human for support. The Christian Fellowship Hospital and the leprosy eradication programmes of Dr. Jacob Cherian have a tremendous influence on the people of Tamil Nadu and all around the country. The dedicated work of the

team of doctors, nurses and others at Oddanchatram bears splendid witness to the true Christian mission as envisaged by Jesus and repeatedly underscored by Gandhi. The gospel is truly lived and it spreads its fragrance like the rose. Again the Gandhian vision is vindicated.

While, summing up it must be recalled that Gandhi had visualised a constructive role for Christians and Christian missions in India. As a person who tried earnestly to live the message of Jesus, Gandhi had the moral authority to call upon Christian missions to live like Jesus, adopt the way of the cross thus emanate the fragrance of the gospel all around rather than indulge in mere verbal exercises like preaching and provocative actions like proselytizing. This, he considered, especially important in the pluralistic context of India where the major faiths of the world co-exited in an atmosphere of mutual respect and open dialogue. Many great Christian personalities and missionaries understood the significance of Gandhi's approach and endorsed it through their words and deeds. This is not to ignore the fact that for most Christian missionaries Gandhi was a challenge and caused a religious dilemma which they could not overcome because their convictions were the result of sectarian training indoctrination. Those who believed that preaching was as crucial a part of mission as living the way of Jesus disagreed with Gandhi; so also did those who blindly believed in conversion. But it is encouraging to note that many mission groups, organisations and individuals are

faithfully adhering to and following the Gandhian model by engaging in selfless service for the most depraved sections of Indian society consciously refraining from preaching and proselytizing. As these groups and individuals witness this approach has succeeded much better than any other in making the life and message of Jesus meaningful and acceptable to the followers of other faiths in this great land of faiths-and thus validates the efficacy of the Gandhian model.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The last two decades of the twentieth century saw an unprecedent growth of communalism in India. It appears that the survival of the secular edifice of the state is under threat. In several parts of India, particularly in the states of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa, there is an intensified and systematic campaign by the Hindutva proponents against religious minorities in general and Christian communities and Christian missions in particular. The main allegation relates to coercive conversion from Hinduism to Christianity. Hindu militant groups are up in arms against missionaries and Christian communities. They allege that Christians are antinationals and their mission activities are part of an international conspiracy to destabilise India. They portray Christianity as an alien or foreign religion and argue that Christians have extra-territorial allegiance, and are disloyal to the nation. They also see a plot to defame Hinduism and evangelise the whole of India. They fear that by mass conversion Christians will gradually outnumber Hindus and the country will became a Christian country by reducing the Hindus to a minority. Any further increase in Christian population, they see as a 'threat' to the nation's very ethos, which they perceive is essentially Hindu.

It is true that during the colonial time substantial number of Dalits and other backward classes were converted to Christianity. Most of the conversions were from backward classes. But by and large, they were not real spiritual change of heart. It was conceived by them chiefly as a social mobility device. Mission services encouraged conversions and many were lured to leave their ancestral religion. He contemporary situation is not any different. The old western missionary attitudes and presuppositions of adding numbers to the church still dominate the Christian missionary priority in India today.

The Hindutva criticism that Christian missions are attempting to gain converts by inducement is as old as the inception of Christian mission activity in India. They suspect missions' social service because they see it as a trap to win converts. What Hindu militants are doing today is to highlight and exaggerate this negative side of mission work and use it to intimidate Christians. The protagonists of Hindutva ideology use this hate campaign portraying Christians as anti-nationals, aliens and a threat to the stability of the nation successfully as part of a political campaign for mass mobilisation.

The charge of the intricate connection between Christian missions and the colonial imperial power, the assumption of cultural superiority of western missionaries and the use of the gospel as an instrument to serve selfish political-cultural ends were found to be true to a considerable extent and have already been evaluated in this study. (This complex political-cultural motivation of western missions often

obscured the dedicated work and self-sacrifice of many sincere western missionaries). The negative aspect of mixing up humanitarian service with conversion, particularly of the dalits and tribals, continues to elicit strong anti-missionary reaction from among vast non-Christian population in India. The suspicion and fear in Hindu fold is that the old assumptions and strategies of the missions for Christianising are still held by the present Christian missionary agencies in new forms. There are many who view it as part of neo-imperialist strategies. Hindu militants allege that there is a worldwide campaign on behalf of well-established Christian organisations which in alliance with powerful western Christian nations to wean people away from Hinduism. This has led not only to social tension and clashes between Christian and Hindu militant groups in different parts of India, but also resulted in the creation and propagation of communalism in an alarming scale.

The Sangh Parivar took Golwalkar's Hindutva ideology as its starting point. It defines nation ethnically and culturally, not politically. This means that in India only those who belong to the Hindu religion ethnically and culturally are part of the nation. The minorities—Christians and Muslims— are not integral part of the nation; they do not belong to it. It is, therefore, naturally intolerant to non-Indic cultural variants and religions. The socio-cultural subjugation of minority communities therefore constitutes an important component of its ideology. The suggestion of Golwalkar seem to be their guiding star: "To keep up the purity of the nation and its culture, Germany

shocked the world by her purging of the country of the Semitic racesthe Jews...a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by".
Golwalkar portrayed Christians along with Muslims as internal threats
and depicted Indian Christians as mere agents of an international
conspiracy for the spread of Christianity. Addressing the question of
accommodating the minorities in this country which is multi-religious
he said that non-Hindus may stay in the country but wholly
subordinated to Hindu nation claiming no privileges, far less any
preferential treatment not even full citizenship rights. Thus it becomes
clear that the present campaign and attack on Christians are part of a
coherent and continuing ideological tradition of Hindutva which
smacks of fascist tendencies.

Most of the allegations against Christians are not borne out by clear evidence. Take for example the complaint that Christian population is rapidly increasing due to the conversion activities of the missions. The fact is that the percentage of Christian population has only decreased in the last decade. According to the 1981 census figures the percentage of Christian was 2.43% of India's population. In 1991 it has decreased to 2.34% where as in 2001 it is estimated to be only 2.18%. So the accusation of the Sangh Parivar about the rapid growth in Christian population by mass conversion does not correspond to authentic facts and figures.

To dub Christianity as alien and imported to India by the colonial powers is also historically untrue and unfounded. Indian

Christianity is as old as Christianity itself. Christianity found its roots in India before it went to countries like England, Portugal and Spain. As pointed out in the beginning it was none other than St. Thomas the apostle of Jesus who introduced Christianity in India. It developed in India as an essentially Indian religion and was integrated into the socio-cultural life of the land. The life and traditions of the earliest Christian community (St. Thomas Christians of Kerala) bear testimony to the accommodative nature of Hinduism and Christianity. Christianity is as much a religion of the Indian soil as any other religion. So it can be reasonably assumed that the charge that Christianity is an alien religion is raised with a clear political motive and as part of a strategy for the propagation of the Hindutva ideology.

Sangh Parivar dub Christians as anti-nationals, and agents of foreign power working to disintegrate the country. There is ample evidence in history to show that Christians are no less patriotic and nationalistic than the followers of other religions. The list of eminent Christians who served the country with dedication and patriotic zeal is long. Yet, special mention must be made of Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Sophia Wadia, J.C. Kumarappa, S.K. George, and K.C. Banarjee, S.K. Rudra et. al. The contributions of the Christian community towards national integration and development would match and even excel that of any other religious community of India through their educational institutions, health centres and social service activities. It has been pointed out that the hidden reason behind the opposition to Christian social activities for uplift of downtrodden sections is that the Hindu

upper castes do no like the outcastes to come up in life and assert their rights. The upper caste people want to maintain the status quo. They oppose any changes in the traditional social structure and never allow the outcastes to get educated and attain social mobility or assert their political rights. Christian missions through their involvement in educational work help to liberate at least certain sections of the social outcastes and conscientise and empower them to assert their rights. Consequently exploitation is resisted. Resistance to exploitation by the oppressed sections and the conflict that inevitably follow is what is termed as social disruption. To cover this up the Hindutva forces raise the smokescreen of anti-nationalism.

It is argued that the objection of Hindu militant groups is not against alien religions as such but against conversions to these religions. When conversion occurs from Hinduism to any one of the religions of Indian origin-say to Buddhism or Sikhism-the opposition is not strong or violent. On the contrary, when they embrace one of the so-called non-Indic religions-say Christianity or Islam- their patriotism becomes suspect and they are called disloyal. This, too, has its roots in Savarkar's definition of 'Who is a Hindu'. According to Savarkar, a Hindu is one who fulfils among other specifications the criteria of total dedication to *Pithrubhoomi* (fatherland) and *Punyabhoomi* (Holy Land), which is only India, and within the territorial bounds of India. Those who do not consider the geographical India as their *punyabhoomi* and *pithrubhoomi* are aliens and do not have a right to stay in India. According to Savarkar the Holy Land of Christians is

Jerusalem<sup>1</sup>. So they are accused of having extra-territorial loyalties and hence they are guilt of treason. This perception, which conflates religious identity with loyalty to one's state, lies at the root of the problem.

The approach of early Christian missions was chiefly evangelism and conversion. This attitude created natural hostility to the activities of the missionaries. The problem was examined in detail by the Nivogi commission (1954). The Niyogi commission probed missionary activities in the state of Madhya Pradesh and found that evangelization in India was not prompted by spiritual motives. It appeared to the commission to be part of a uniform world policy to revive Christendom for re-establishing western supremacy. The Niyogi Commission naturally censured Christian missionary activities from that angle. But at the same time it appreciated missions as pioneers in the field of educational and medical work in rural India unreached by the government and other agencies. But the negative points raised by the Commission are still valid and the Hindu nationalist groups underscore them and raise them as their rhetoric of validation. Changing one's religion is considered equal to denationalising oneself. Many Christian mission groups believe and propagate that a change in

In fact all Christians do not consider Jerusalem as their holy land – *punyabhoomi* – as defined by Savarkar. Most Christians (mark, not all of them) hold all the regions traversed by Jesus during his public ministry as holy. For Christians loyalty as dedication to the holy land is not an important religious or cultural principle. And it is not in a chauvinistic or absolutist sense in which it is described holy. This qualitative difference in the concept of what constitutes 'holy land' and *punyabhoomi* is crucial in understanding the loyalty of the followers of various religions to the countries they live in.

one's religion must necessarily lead to adopting a new culture and life style. It need not necessarily be so. But in the past it had very often led to such a cultural change. Vast majority of the Indian Christians has adopted western life style. The new converts into Christianity today also embrace an alien life style all because they have changed their religion. Hence Hindu nationalists look at every Christian activity as a cultural onslaught and protest this cultural imperialism. Gandhi too was critical of this deculturisation tendency. He said that Christian mission should be extremely careful not to introduce yet one more division into already divided Indian people, or even help to perpetuate existing divisions.

This naturally gives rise to the question of naturalisation of an alien religion. Many Christian missionaries had discussed with Gandhi the question of naturalising Christianity in India. When Stanley Jones once asked Gandhi, what can Christians do to make Christianity get naturalised in India, he replied: first, live more like Jesus Christ, second, don't adulterate or tone down your religion, third, make love central in your working force, fourth, study the non-Christian religions more sympathetically in order to have a more sympathetic approach to other religions. He asked Christian missions to cultivate humility and a receptive mood to know this land better. On how Christianity could best help India, Gandhi told S.W. Clemes that what India needed most of all was sympathy. He asked missions to utilise their abilities without mental reservation, sympathetically study India's institutions and suggest changes wherever necessary.

Gandhi's criticisms of Christianity was mainly centred around two points, one its exclusivism and its Europeanism and the other giving up of its living faith in the practicability of the Sermon on the Mount. He said the conversion that Jesus taught was spiritual rebirth, and not formal conversion from one religion to another. Religion was a highly personal matter for the individual and his God. He disputed missionary's claim that Christianity was the only true religion. He said it was also a true religion, a noble religion. But Christianity's identification with European culture created a serious problem of its credibility. Gandhi had characterised modern European civilisation as satanic. According to him what modern western civilisation was propagating was irreligion and immorality. He complained that Jesus of Nazareth was little understood in Europe. His firm opinion was that Europe represented not the spirit of God or Christianity, but the spirit Europe was only nominally Christian. In reality it was of Satan. worshipping Mammon, wrote Gandhi. He thus considered western Christianity in its practical working as a negation of Christ's Christianity. When Gandhi travelled through the length and breadth of India he saw many Christians who were almost ashamed of their birth, ancestral religion and their ancestral dress. They were miserably imitating the Europeans. The aping of Europeans on the part of the Anglo-Indians was bad enough said Gandhi, 'but the aping of them by Indian converts is a violence done to their country and even to their new religion'. Gandhi disapproved of converts losing their native culture, changing their dress, or their names. His position was that

Indian Christians should stand in the stream of India's culture and life and interpret Christ in a framework of India's heritage.

Gandhi disliked the idea of conversion as professed and attempted by missionaries seeking to augment their flock. Gandhi explained to his Christian friends that men and women could work out their own salvation following their own tradition and had no need to change their labels unless the spirit moved them. He was not against genuine conversion but was against the methods of proselytizing adopted by missionaries. He considered it as a great impediment to world's progress towards peace. He regarded conversion as a highly personal matter for the individual and his God and he believed that it touched the heart. Years of experience of witnessing proselytizing by Christian missionaries both in South Africa and India had convinced him that it had not raised the general moral standard of the converts who had imbibed only the superficialities of European civilisation and had missed the teaching of Jesus. He said if a person discarded his country, his customs and his old connections and manners when he changed his religion he became all the more unfit to gain knowledge of God. For a change of religion meant really a conversion of the heart. 'When there is real conversion, the man's heart grows' Gandhi had said. Again, he said, conversion must not mean denationalisation. 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.

Gandhi held that proselytization under the cloak of humanitarian work was immoral and unhealthy. Christian mission work, particularly humanitarian services must be, like Caesar's wife, above suspicion. Faith was not imparted like secular subjects. It was given through the language of the heart. His position was that if a man had a living faith in Him it would spread its aroma like the rose its scent. Because of its invisibility the extent of its influence would be far wider them that of the visible beauty of the colour of the petals. Conversion, now days, has become a matter of business like any other. India was in no need of conversion of this kind. Conversion in the sense of self-purification, self-realisation was crying need of the time.

Gandhi was more concerned about the way and extent to which Christians neglected the teachings of Jesus. He feared that the followers had gone away from the original purity of Christ's teachings. He believed that the Sermon on the Mount comprised within it the whole of Christianity for one who wanted to live a true Christian life. In other words, a true Christian was one who practised the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount. Hence he repeatedly exhorted the missionaries to become a walking rose, spreading the eternal fragrance of Christ. As the rose spreads its fragrance silently, so should Christian missionaries radiate the spirit of Christian love and service to humanity. Thus one who wanted to bear witness to the genuine or bonafide truth of Christianity must be a living exemplar like Christ.

Gandhi went to the extent of saying that; "if then, I had to face only the Sermon on the Mount and my own interpretation of it, I should not hesitate to say: oh yes, I am a Christian..." It has been universally acknowledged that Gandhi lived out the Christian ideals and that he had demonstrated how the Sermon could be translated into practice. The observation of Kingsely Martin is illustrative: "I regard Gandhi as probably being of all modern leaders the most faithful interpreter of the philosophy of the Gospels".

The sad fact was that Gandhi's guidelines for conduct of Christian mission in India had /have limited appeal to many Christians. All the same his relevance and significance for Christianity has been recognised. During his life time some of the headlines in the American paper The Christian Century ran as follows: 'Gandhi before Pilate', 'Gandhi lifts the Cross'. At the time of Gandhi's launching of the salt march to Dandi, many of his disciples were drawing comparisons between Gandhi and Jesus deliberately setting his face towards Jerusalem and confronting the authorities. S.K. George, described Gandhi as 'one in whom the central principle of the cross has again incarnated itself'. C.F. Andrews, who become Gandhi's model of Christian ministry, expressed a similar sentiment. On seeing Gandhi during one of his fasts, Andrews said, 'with a rush of emotion, I knew then deeply... the meaning of the cross'. Stanley Jones aptly described Gandhi as one who taught him more of the spirit of Christ than anyone else. As one who applied the message of the cross on a national scale, Jones added, 'never in human history has so much light been shed on

the cross as has been through this one man'. In Gandhi's words, 'Living Christ means living the cross and without it life is a living death'.

## Gandhian guidelines for Christian missions in India, a summing up

The first point the Christian missions should take cognisance of in a country like India is the fact and significance of religious pluralism prevailing there. Viewed from the perspective of religion and culture, pluralism is to be understood as something given, purposeful and beautiful. Variety and diversity are inherent in creation. It is an expression of the greatness of the mystery of God's manifestation of himself through creation. Both the fauna and flora, both the animate and the inanimate forms of creation reflect rich and unimaginable diversity. Therefore, it is not right to think and insist that God who created this world with such a beautiful diversity require a particular form of religious response from all humans. Christian missions must understand next that in the Indian/Hindu tradition truth is intuited as one and indivisible though the wise speak of it differently (Ekam sat vipra bahuta vadanti). Just as truth is comprehended and reported variously, there are different paths-margas-to reach the Truth. Religions–dharma(s)–and philosophies –darsana(s)–are viewed as different roads converging on the same goal of Truth/God. All that is true and good in different religions and cultures are god-given and hence beneficial for human progress and well being. The same idea finds expression in the Bible when it says that Jesus came to fulfil and

not to destroy, to enrich and not to impoverish. Thirdly, true Christian mission shall not aim at the mere numerical growth of church by indulging in mass conversion. If it involves conversion it must be conversion to the reign of God for the realisation of authentic humanity. This is what Jesus envisaged and called for. Christian missions in India cannot be understood apart from their active participation in the struggles for justice of the oppressed peoples, for freedom from all dehumanising factors including ignorance and superstitions and for communal harmony. There are situations where people live in marginalized and sub-human conditions, oppressed and exploited by the upper caste people. Missions have to work in these areas selflessly bringing liberation within their reach and restoring to them their lost dignity and self-respect.

Hatred and violence would not provide any solution to the precarious communal problem in India. How Christian missions can best serve India was a crucial question that Christian missionaries both individually and collectively had posed to Gandhi many a time. He had commented extensively on the role of Christian Missions on different occasions. His stand was that missions should not create suspicion and hostility among people for whom they work. Further he said that missionaries have to go to the lowly cottages not to give them something but to take something from them. He asked missionaries to cultivate receptiveness, humility and willingness to identify themselves with the masses of India.

Gandhi was clearly against proselytization. He believed in *Sarvadharma Samabhava*—equality of religions and equal respect for all religions. According to him all the great faiths of India—Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism etc. were self-sufficing. No one faith was perfect, he went on, all faiths were equally dear to their respective votaries. What was wanted, therefore, was living friendly contact among the followers of the great religions of the world and not a clash among them in the fruitless attempt on the part of each community to show superiority of its faith over the rest. This approach provides the only sound basis for the peaceful co-existence of religions in India.

To the question, what is the most effective way of preaching the gospel of Christ, Gandhi answered: "To live the gospel is the most effective way—most effective in the beginning, in the middle and in the end. Preaching jars on me and makes no appeal to me and I get suspicious of missionary who preaches. But I love those who never preach but live the life according to their lights. Their lives are silent, yet most effective testimonies...I can say that a life of service and uttermost simplicity is the best preaching". Further Gandhi brought in the simile of the rose in this context and explained that the rose did not preach but spread its fragrance. 'The fragrance is its own sermon. If it had human understanding and if it could engage a number of preachers, it would not be able to sell more roses than the fragrance itself could do.

The fragrance of religions and spiritual life is much finer and subtler than that of the rose'.

Gandhi repeatedly underscored the point that mission work should scrupulously avoid any attempt that would disturb the sound cultural base of the people they propose to serve. 'If you come to give education you must give it after the Indian pattern', he exhorted the missions, 'you should sympathetically study our institution and suggest change... If people from the west come on Indian terms, they would supply a felt want'. Later on he made the following appeal to Christian missions: "It is a conviction daily growing upon me that the great and rich Christian missions will render true service to India if they can persuade themselves to confine their activities to humanitarian services without the ulterior motive of converting India or at least her unsophisticated villagers to Christianity, and destroying their social super structure". He firmly believed that what was true in Hindu faith and Indian culture would abide and what was untrue would fall to pieces. So he requested the Christian missions to leave the other faiths alone and let them rejuvenate themselves on the power latent in them.

It is important to note at this juncture that the Hindutva ideologues often quote Gandhi in support of their opposition to Christian mission activities. They have succeeded in creating confusion in the minds of many right thinking people by doing this. Therefore, a comparison of the approaches of Gandhi and the Hindutva proponents becomes crucial here. For Gandhi all religions were

fundamentally equal; no religion was perfect. There were truths in all of them as there were errors also. So the question of comparative merit did not arise. Gandhi insisted that a follower of truth or a man of religion should read the scriptures of other religions reverentially, with an open mind and to find out and copy what were good in them and use them to improve one's own faith. The attempt to find out errors or drawbacks in other faiths should be scrupulously avoided and that duty must be left to be fulfilled by the followers of the respective faiths. Thus it is crystal clear that Gandhi had an open mind, he was ready to assimilate the good in other faiths and admit that there were imperfections in his faith and improve it in the light of what he learned from other faiths. Also he saw the possibility of a positive role for all religions that existed in India in its public life. Hindutva ideologues, on the contrary, have made it clear through their writings and activities that they lack openness and have adopted a very chauvinistic view of culture and a fundamentalist position on religion inspite of the fact that historically and culturally they are part of the Hindu tradition, which never promote chauvinism or fundamentalism. Gandhi saw a role in India even for Christian missions if they refrained from proselytization and confined themselves to humanitarian work. Hindutva ideologists do not subscribe to this view at all. They are for a total ban on all mission work-even selfless humanitarian service, because for them Christians-in spite of their unbroken history of 2000 years-are aliens and their loyalty to the nation is always suspect. Gandhi never shared this perception. He could see a role, not only for Indian Christians but

also even for foreign Christians if they were ready to serve the people of this land selflessly. It was a unique contribution of Gandhi to distinguish between the evil and evildoer. He applied this to the missionaries also. Even while he differed with them, he could be their friend and guide. He had been on a continual dialogue with them since his student days in London to the end of his life. He admitted that he could broaden his vision and understanding of his own religion as a result of this dialogue. The Hindutva ideologues do not seem to be ready for a frank and honest dialogue. Needless to say that this is not in keeping with the Hindu/Indian ethos. In short, a comparison of Gandhi's encounter with Christianity and Christian missions and that of the proponents of Hindutva would provide ample evidence to prove that it is Gandhi and not the Hindutva protagonists who is a true follower of the tolerant Hindu tradition and that to quote Gandhi's principled opposition to proselytization for justifying Hindutva fundamentalist approach is a gross distortion of truth.

Gandhi believed that if properly understood and lived, the message of the gospel would act as a leaven and renew and strengthen Indian life. By imbibing the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount a Hindu will learn to be a better Hindu and a Muslim, a better Muslim. According to him to be a good Hindu was to be a good Christian and, therefore, there was no need to 'become' a Christian to be a believer in the beauty of the teachings of Jesus and to try to follow his example. Gandhi was of the view that the gospel was addressed not to Christians or to the Churches but to the entire humanity (whereas the church is

dependent on the gospel, the gospel is fully independent of the church). He also added that Jesus Christ belonged not to any community but to the whole world.

The followers of Jesus are called the salt and the light of the earth. They must let their light shine before others. The time seems to be up for the salt to begin its taste-giving activity in a quiet way rather than in an aggressively missionary manner. In the midst of communal conflicts and religious fundamentalism India needs missionaries whose life manifests 'the gospel of the rose', who are praying saints rather than thundering preachers. The world will be healed by such saints who manifest God's tender love and receive all creatures in divine hospitality and are genuinely sensitive to the riches of other religions, to different cultures, to all sentient beings and God's gift of creation. Thus the hallmark of a good Christian is that he or she is against converting anybody. Once Mother Theresa was asked how many persons she had converted. Her answer was: "Yes I have converted so many and the number is countless. I have converted a large number of bad Christians to good Christians, bad Hindus to good Hindus, and bad Muslims to good Muslims but I have not converted a single non-Christian to Christian. If you can point one like that I will do the penance for it<sup>2</sup>. Mother Theresa believed that the Kingdom of God was not for those who achieved large number of conversions to

Desmont Doig, Mother Theresa: Her People and her Work (London: Collins, 1976) 156 - 158.

Christianity. She knew that the Kingdom of God was reserved only for those who did the will of the Heavenly father as expressed in the Sermon on the Mount and other teachings of Jesus<sup>3</sup>.

Gandhi was definitely a precursor in this broader approach being adopted by some Christian missions today. He sincerely believed that Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsis and Jews were convenient labels in our earthly existence. We are all children of the same God and all are judged not according to their professions. Therefore, his advice to all religionists was to retain their tradition so long as it did not cramp ones growth and does not debar one from assimilating all that is good anywhere else.

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St. Mathew 7:21 reads; "Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven".

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#### **APPENDIX**

# **QUESTIONNAIRE**

### A. To a Christian worker

- 1. What is your motive behind working in the villages of India?
- 2. After preaching the gospel why do you ask hearers to convert to Christianity?
- 3. In Indian tradition there are many ways to God. Why do you ask non-Christians to follow one specific way for salvation i.e. the Christian way?
- 4. For conversion do you use any inducement other than the message of the gospel?
- 5. Do you witness any qualitative change in the life of the converts after their conversion?
- 6. Do you confront any opposition for your work from any quarters?
- 7. Do you give the converts further training for improving their way of life for missionary work in villages?

#### B. To a Christian convert

- 1. Why did you leave your ancestral faith/customs?
- 2. Why did you specifically choose Christianity since in your religion itself you can choose a way for your spiritual fulfilment?
- 3. Was there any opposition to you from your family/village people for conversion?
- 4. What are the changes that have occurred in your daily living after embracing Christianity?
- 5. Did anybody persuade you to change your faith through monetary or material inducements?
- 6. Does Hindu organisations compel you to return to your old faith?

## C. To a Hindu activist

1. Since freedom of expression and right to profess and practise any belief is given as constitutional right, why do you oppose preaching of the gospel and conversion?

- 2. Many villagers are embracing Christianity because they are discriminated against in Hinduism and are treated as untouchables where as they are treated on the basis of equality in the new Religion. What are your comments about social discrimination in Hinduism?
- 3. It is reported that Hindu activist are forcefully converting Christian tribals. Why do you indulge in this activity?