THE 2012 BENJAMIN EBY LECTURE*

Gandhi and Mennonites in India

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Introduction

This lecture is part of my ongoing research on Mennonite missionaries in India, especially their interpretation of Hinduism. Here I examine how Mennonites and Gandhi interpreted Hinduism and Christianity, and expressed their commitment to nonviolence.

Background Chronology

When Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi[1] was born on October 2, 1869 in Porbandar, a coastal town on the Arabian Sea on the northwest coast of India in the present state of Gujarat, there were no Mennonites in that country. At the time of his birth, the first Mennonites who would come there as missionaries, Abraham Friesen and Maria Martens, were children, ten and nine years old, living in south Russia.[2] Nineteen years later, when Gandhi sailed from Bombay to England in September 1888 to study law in London, Friesen and Martens had married and were studying at the Baptist Missionary School at Hamburg-Horn in Germany, preparing for missionary service in India.[3] Nearly three years later, on June 10, 1891, Gandhi was called to the bar in London. Two days after that he boarded the steamship "Oceana" for the return trip to his native land.[4] By the time he arrived, the Friesens were

[1] There are many biographies and studies of M.K. Gandhi. The major sources for general information and interpretation of Gandhi's life for this article were Rajmohan Gandhi, *Gandhi: The Man, His People and the Empire* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2008); Joseph Lelyveld, *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and His Struggle With India* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011); Judith M. Brown and Anthony Parel, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Gandhi* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011).

[2] Peter Penner, *Russians, North Americans, and Telegus: The Mennonite Brethren Mission in India 1885-1975* (Winnipeg, MB: Kindred Productions, 1997), 1.

[3] Ibid., 2.

[4] Rajmohan Gandhi, 46.

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already settled in Nalgonda, about 65 miles east of the city of Hyderabad, in the present state of Andhra Pradesh. Although they were supported by the Mennonite Brethren in Russia, Abraham was pastor of a church of 300 members that had been established and sponsored by the American Baptist Missionary Union (ABMU).[5]

Thus, in 1891, for the first time Gandhi and Mennonites were both in India. But that circumstance was not to last long. Gandhi's first attempts at practicing law were unsuccessful, so he accepted an invitation to represent a law firm in South Africa. On April 19, 1893, after less than two years back in India, he boarded the "Safari" and sailed from Bombay to Durban. Although he intended to stay for only a year to complete the specific legal business he had been sent to transact, it would be more than 21 years before he returned to live in India again.[6]

When Gandhi arrived in Bombay on January 9, 1915, there were a dozen Mennonite churches, several schools, orphanages, clinics and hospitals, and 50 Mennonite missionaries in India. The Mennonite Brethren, who had begun their work in 1889, were clustered in the Hyderabad region. Mennonite Church missionaries, who had arrived in 1899, and General Conference Mennonite missionaries, who entered India in 1900, were in the Chhattisgarh region about 500 miles southwest of Calcutta, near the main railway line to Bombay.[7]

Mennonite missionaries came to India in response to two main impulses. First, they were deeply affected by the revivalism, pietism, and evangelism of Baptists and Lutherans that had stimulated the birth of the

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[5] Penner, 3.

[6] The story of Gandhi's years in Africa is recounted and interpreted quite differently in Rajmohan Gandhi, 53-174, and Lelyveld, 3-133.

[7] The fullest Mennonite Brethren accounts are by Penner, cited earlier, and Paul. D. Wiebe, *Heirs and Joint Heirs: Mission to Church Among the Mennonite Brethren of Andhra Pradesh* (Winnipeg, MB: Kindred Productions, 2010). The story of the Mennonite Church in India has been told by John Allen Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India, 1897-1962* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1972). Ruth Unrau has written *A Time to Bind and a Time to Loose: A History of the General Conference Mennonite Church Mission Involvement in India from 1900-1995* (Newton, KS: Commission on Overseas Mission, General Conference Mennonite Church, 1996). These missionaries and their sponsoring agencies also published 25-year and 50-year anniversary volumes in addition to regular annual reports. Many missionaries published personal memoirs after their service in India.

Mennonite Brethren ("MB") movement in Russia and strongly influenced many Mennonites in the United States. In both the US and Russia, numerous Mennonites became convinced that they had a spiritual responsibility beyond the preservation of their own community. Using the language and worldview of the day, they increasingly expressed concern that they were not doing enough to ensure that the "heathen" heard the message of salvation and came to faith in Christ.[8] In the late 19th century all the major Mennonite groups in the US established mission and relief organizations, such as the Mennonite Evangelizing and Benevolent Board of the Mennonite Church, the General Conference Foreign Mission Board, and the Foreign Mission Committee of the Mennonite Brethren. Locally there were Home Mission projects initiated in Philadelphia and Chicago, and among native Americans in frontier regions. As well, some Mennonites served with or supported the mission agencies of other denominations.

Mennonites also raised funds for international relief efforts in response to the earthquakes, famines, and wars reported in the newspapers. It was this second impulse that brought Mennonite Church and General Conference Mennonites to India. George Lambert, an entrepreneurial minister from Indiana, traveled around the world in 1894-95, frequently staying with Protestant missionaries. He maintained correspondence with some of them after returning to the US, and through them he became aware of the devastating famine in several regions of India in 1897. He and other Mennonite leaders in the Elkhart, Indiana region established the Home and Foreign Relief Committee, and sent letters to Mennonite congregations asking them for "an act of love for the rescuing of the poor, starving people in India."[9] In partnership with other relief funds they quickly raised more than $200,000 in cash and grain to send to that country.

Lambert traveled to India in April 1897 and oversaw the distribution of food and money. While there he sent weekly reports to the Mennonite paper, the *Herald of Truth*. Later he published those reports in a book, *India, the Horror-Stricken Empire, Containing a Full Account of the Famine, Plague, and Earthquake of 1896-97. Including a Complete Narration of the Relief*

[8] See Wilbert R. Shenk, *By Faith They Went Out: Mennonite Missions 1850-1999* (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2000), ch. 6.
[9] Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India, 1897-1962*, 29.

Work Through the Home and Foreign Relief Commission (Berne, 1898). This impetus more than any other brought Mennonites to the Chhattisgarh plain in India's Central Province, where the effects of the famine were still severe two years later.

Whether the original mission impetus was establishing churches or feeding the hungry, Mennonite mission work in different locations soon looked much the same.[10] There was famine and disaster relief. Clinics and hospitals were established, including significant work among those with leprosy (Hansen's Disease). Children were taught literacy and trades in orphanages and schools. Missionaries and Indian Christians traveled from town to town preaching, handing out Christian literature, and offering medical care. Converts were baptized and churches were established. To use today's language, it was holistic mission. For these Mennonites, worship, ethics, economic life, and health were interdependent. They quipped that their mission was "Soup, soap, and salvation."[11] They were not being ironic.

The Mennonite churches in India were established among marginalized people, poor, low caste or outcaste, and tribal groups. It is difficult for us today to imagine the extent and severity of their marginalization. Their huts were outside the main part of the village. They could not drink water from the same wells, share food, travel with, or worship in the same temples as higher caste Hindus. Barbers would not cut their hair and washermen would not do their laundry. They were almost all illiterate. Their occupations were indicative of their status. In Chhattisgarh the prominent occupational group with whom Mennonites worked was the Chamar, a leatherworking caste involved with the polluting activities of handling dead animals. Lepers, another marginalized group in Chhattisgarh, for many years constituted a large portion of the church membership. In the Hyderabad region many Mennonites were of Mala or Madiga background.[12] The Malas were servants, coolies, basket weavers, and field laborers, while the Madigas were scavengers, leather workers, and coolies.

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[10] James C. Juhnke, *A People of Mission: A History of General Conference Mennonite Overseas Missions* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1979), 30-32.
[11] Ibid., 30.
[12] Paul D. Wiebe, *Christians in Andhra Pradesh: The Mennonites of Mahbubnagar* (Bangalore: Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1988), 54-55.

Most of the first Mennonite converts were low and outcaste employees of the missionaries, residents of the leprosy hospital, or orphans. This defined the character of the local church and Christianity. Even though missionaries always aspired to the ideal of a multi-caste church, the early identity of the church as a haven for the marginalized became a significant barrier to multi-caste membership.

There was another dimension to this marginalization. Many converts were rejected by their families and evicted from their communities when they joined the church. This rejection accentuated the cultural and social separation of Christians and their Hindu neighbors. On the one hand, it provided an opportunity for converts to identify with the educated and privileged missionaries and to gain access to educational and vocational opportunities they would not have had within their social setting. On the other, even if they became well educated, changed occupation, and became economically self-sufficient, they were still stigmatized by their former identity. Thus they were doubly marginalized – for their former identity as outcaste Hindus and for their new Christian identity as religious and social traitors.

This is the context for our look at Gandhi and Mennonites in India.

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Direct interaction between Mennonites and Gandhi was very limited. Missionaries were sometimes in the crowds listening to him speak as he crisscrossed India,[13] as their journals and collections of photographs attest. I. P. Asheervadam writes that Gandhi visited the Mennonites in Dhamtari on two occasions "during the height of the independence movement,"[14]

[13] There is a delightful account of an encounter with Gandhi during one of his visits to a town in northern Bihar where Brethren in Christ missionaries were living. Amos Dick was asked by community leaders to provide goat milk for Gandhi and his entourage. He was eager to ask Gandhi some questions, because he had studied many of Gandhi's speeches. But Gandhi arrived on Monday, his weekly day of silence. So Dick sat in the crowded room, six feet from Gandhi, listening to the click, click, click of the spinning wheel. The next day, when Gandhi addressed the crowds, there was no opportunity for Dick to speak with him. Leoda Buckwalter, *Silhouette: Colonial India as We Lived It* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Press, 1988), 108-09.

[14] John Allen Lapp and C. Arnold Snyder, eds., *Churches Engage Asian Traditions* (Kitchener,

and that MCC worker William Yoder walked with Gandhi in East Bengal when the latter was trying to stop the violence in that region. John Lapp elaborates on one of those Dhamtari visits in late 1933, noting that Gandhi left a gift of Rs.1000 to support outcastes in the community.[15] Weyburn W. Groff mentions a visit that Gandhi made to the Landaur Language School in Mussoorie, soon after Indian independence, to reassure missionaries that there would be freedom of religion in India.[16] The most extensive interaction between Mennonite missionaries and Gandhi appears to have been M.C. Lehman's visit to Gandhi in his ashram in Sabarmuti in 1929 and their conversation about faith and conversion.[17]

There is one record of correspondence between Gandhi and Mennonite missionary J.N. Kauffman. On June 30, 1947 Gandhi sent a postcard to Kauffman with this simple message: "Why worry? I am in the same boat with you." We will return to that enigmatic postcard message later.

I note these few documented encounters to stress that while I am not able to offer much about interactions between Gandhi and Mennonites, because direct interactions were very limited or almost entirely undocumented, I can describe how Gandhi and Mennonites addressed common issues and provide an account of what Mennonites said about Gandhi's work and ideas.

Mennonites and Hinduism

Mennonites and Gandhi agreed that religion was the foundation of life. Religion was the energizing dynamic of culture; it determined the destiny of a society. They agreed that worship, ethics, and community life were inseparably interconnected. Thus it was inexplicable to Mennonites in India that Gandhi would not reject Hinduism and embrace Christianity. Missionaries and Indian Christian converts alike regarded Hinduism as the

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ON: Pandora Press, 2011), 170.

[15] Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India, 1897-1962*, 82-83. The source of this information was a letter from missionary J. N. Kauffman to V. E. Reiff, November 30, 1933, in which Kauffman explained that while he had been invited to be part of the local welcoming committee to greet Gandhi, he declined because of the political implications of such participation.

[16] Weyburn W. Groff, *Satyagraha and Nonresistance: A Comparative Study of Gandhian and Mennonite Nonviolence* (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2009), xvii.

[17] *Goshen College Bulletin* 30, no. 5 (1936): 12.

root cause of the social and spiritual evils that they experienced.

The first Mennonite missionaries knew little about India or its religion when they arrived. Their personal journals, letters to family, reports to mission agencies, sermon and teaching notes, and articles in the Mennonite press describe their impressions and interpretations. After the first pioneer decades of missionary activity there was a substantial reservoir of collective experience, assumptions, and attitudes that shaped the interpretation of Hinduism and Indian culture in the emerging Indian Mennonite church, the North American Mennonite constituency, and the new missionaries who came to India.

Many missionaries were careful students of Indian religious life. Their notebooks contain descriptions of Hindu gods and goddesses, summaries of scriptures, and outlines of Hindu religious teachings that were based largely on their reading of contemporary European scholars such as Max Mueller, Albert Schweitzer, and A. A. MacDonell.[18] They were also diligent ethnographers. They described the shrines and worship of local gods and goddesses and their influence on health, family life, and agriculture. In their letters, articles in the Mennonite Church press, and books they described trips to temples and festivals, preaching excursions, conversations with Indians who were curious about Christian faith, and tense encounters with those who adamantly opposed the missionaries and harassed the converts. More than a dozen missionaries wrote masters or doctoral theses in sociology, anthropology, history, and religious studies based on their experiences in India between 1900 and 1970.[19]

[18] Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India, 1897-1962*, 78-79.

[19] For example, M. C. Lehman (Mennonite Church missionary in India 1906-1930, d. 1963) earned a doctoral degree in philosophy from Yale in 1934 with a thesis on the writings of the 19th-century poet, dramatist, critic, and journalist Bharatendu Harishchandra. Aldine Brunk (Mennonite Church missionary in India 1912-1947, d. 1969) wrote a master's thesis on village evangelism for the College of Missions in Indianapolis in 1921. Henry Krahn (Mennonite Brethren missionary in India 1956-61, d. 1985) completed a master's thesis at the University of Washington in 1962 on the historical development of the MB mission program in India. John Wiebe (Mennonite Brethren missionary in India 1927-1959, d. 1963) wrote a master's thesis at the University of Minnesota in 1949 on the acculturation of the *Madiga*, a low/outcaste group in the state of Andhra Pradesh, who became Christians.

In addition, there are unpublished summaries and evaluations of the religions of India, such as George Jay Lapp's 165-page manuscript, "Historical Development of Hindu Society:

Missionaries not only observed and documented; they also explained, compared, and evaluated Indian religious life from their own religious perspectives and within the framework and cultural assumptions of Europeans and North Americans. For example, George Lapp wrote in 1921 that

> [t]heir religion is based on ancient writings known as the Vedas, Mahabharata, Ramayana, and Bhagvat Gita. The most ancient are philosophical. As the Aryan tribes came into contact with the more materialistic idolatrous aboriginese, they took on their forms of worship till Hinduism had become a system of idolatry represented by the philosophical teachings of those who use images as symbols on the one hand to the worshippers of the images themselves on the other. One says, 'We worship the Deity with symbols, when we bow down to an idol; but we worship the power or virtue or characteristic for which that idol stands'.... But the poor ignorant heathen must have something before him which possesses some real power. So the priest has an idol made, puts it on an altar in a temple, blows in its ears and nose and mouth, puts a garland around its neck and tells the unsophisticated heathen, 'These be thy gods.' When he knows he is telling them a lie.[20]

Their overall assessment of various popular expressions of Hinduism was strongly negative. Hinduism was darkness, Christian faith was light. Hindus were heathen, spiritually ignorant, misguided, and blinded by Satan. "Heathen" was a derogatory term indicating a religion and a culture of inferior quality and value, but also a descriptive term meaning a religion other than Christianity or Judaism.[21] In German the Mennonites referred to all their

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Strength and Weakness of Hinduism." George J. Lapp (and Fannie Hershey Lapp) Collection, Hist.Mss.1-143, Box 1, File 22, Mennonite Church USA Archives–Goshen, Goshen, IN. Lapp, who died in 1951,was a Mennonite Church missionary in India 1905-1945.

[20] George Jay Lapp, *Our Mission in India* (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1921), 13.

[21] The word "heathen" was also used to describe Gandhi, even when complimenting him. In 1929 MB missionary John Voth reported to delegates of the Canadian Conference meeting in Herbert, Saskatchewan that it took "Gandhi, a heathen" to teach the militant Christian nations "the non-resistance which our forefathers for 400 years had tried to bring to the attention of

foreign mission as *Heidenmission*. That language is jarring for many of us now, but it was the language of common public discourse at the time, and it reflected widely shared assumptions in North America and Europe until well after the Second World War. A scholar studying American impressions of India and China wrote in 1958 that "the image of the very benighted heathen Hindu is perhaps the strongest of all that came to us out of India from the past and it retains its full sharpness up to the present day. It appeared, vivid, clear, and particularized. . . . "[22]

What was it that Mennonites found so offensive in Hinduism in the first half of the twentieth century?

First of all, polytheism. Given that one of the defining characteristics of the Jewish and Christian traditions is monotheism, missionaries were astonished and repulsed by the multitude of gods and goddesses. Some deities, like Vishnu, Shiva, Durga, and Kali had a kind of universal character, appearing in multiple manifestations throughout the subcontinent. Others were local, identified with specific natural features like trees or mountains, or with phenomena such as smallpox, weather, harvest, human sexual fertility, or childrearing. There were plenty of popular stories about the scheming exploits, conflicts, fits of temper, and sexual prowess of gods and goddesses.

Second, there was popular worship. Gandhi quoted the aphorism "As is the God, so is the votary."[23] He meant it to express the aspiration that people could become like the gods they worshiped. For Mennonites, the phrase concisely identified the problem. The gods and popular forms of worship were all around them – temples, idols, sacrifices, processions, and festivals with pulsating chanting, drumming, and dancing. There were priests colored with ashes, ocher, and blood red paint. In temples and pilgrimage sites, surging crowds of worshipers frantically pushed for glimpses of the god or goddess. And everywhere there were religious devotees with long

the nations." Cited in Penner, 143.

[22] Harold R. Isaacs, *Scratches on our Minds: American Images of China and India* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1958), 259. See also Stephen Prothero, "Hinduphobia and Hinduphilia in U.S. Culture," in *The Stranger's Religion: Fascination and Fear,* Anna Lannstrom, ed.(Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 13-37.

[23] Cited in M.K. Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), 10. The quote is taken from Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule* (Phoenix, Natal, South Africa: International Printing Press, 1910), ch. 16, n.p.

matted hair, bodies pierced and emaciated in self-mortification. Mennonites interpreted the powerfully sensuous Hindu worship as an expression of the character of the gods. And they were horrified.

Mennonites were people of the book, the Bible. In India they encountered not only a bewildering variety of Scriptures with varying levels of authority, but also mass illiteracy. Like other Protestants at that time, Mennonites were very anti-Catholic, and their critique of Hinduism on this issue was nearly identical to their criticisms of Catholics in other settings, namely that the priests were deliberately keeping the mass of people ignorant. Bible translation and literacy education were always among the first priorities of Protestant and Mennonite missions.[24] Missionaries also frequently referred to the superstitions and fears of local populations about matters such as weather, agriculture, illness, and propitious dates for travel or weddings. For most of these issues, missionaries had naturalistic explanations and responses. Like most Protestants, they de-spiritualized the material universe.[25] But the Christian practice was not consistent. While missionaries and Indian Christians emphasized the folly of praying to local deities for healing, they always prayed for healing in the name of Jesus, and thanked God for intervening on behalf of those who were healed.

Finally, Hinduism legitimated the caste system that was the most defining characteristic of Indian society. Caste divided people into very broad categories and specific occupational groups. It defined the permissible relationships and interactions among groups on matters like marriage, eating, access to temples, and physical contact. The domination of some caste groups by others was justified on the grounds that people's situation in this life was a reward or punishment for good or bad behavior in past lives. The most egregious manifestation of caste was the practice of untouchability that marginalized tens of millions to the fringes of communities, to demeaning work, and to massive exploitation. Missionaries, colonial administrators,

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[24] See Prothero, "Hinduphobia and Hinduphilia in U.S. Culture," 27-31.

[25] As the anthropologist Paul Hiebert so cogently argued, this led to the "flaw of the excluded middle," the separation of the spiritual and the material that has characterized post-Enlightenment thought. This "middle" involves such matters as disease, accidents, childbirth, planting crops, setting dates of weddings, aligning a house, and setting off on a journey. See Paul G. Hiebert, "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," *Missiology: An International Review* 10, no. 1 (January 1982): 35-47.

traders, travelers, and a significant number of Indians regarded Hinduism as then widely practiced as the primary cause of the degradation of so many in India.

Gandhi and Hinduism

What about Gandhi? He championed the cause of the untouchables, whom he called harijans (children of God), but who call themselves Dalits (those who are crushed). How did he interpret Hinduism? What were his own religious practices?

Gandhi was born a Hindu and followed the Vaishnava practices of his family without much reflection till he went to England to study law. There he met British people who introduced him to books and ideas that significantly shaped his lifelong religious worldview.[26] A vegetarian by practice, he now became one by conviction. He developed friendships with Theosophists (members of a philosophical-occult movement with high regard for the religions of India) who "disabused [him] of the notion fostered by the missionaries that Hinduism was rife with superstition."[27] Theosophist friends invited him to study the Bhagavad Gita with them, thinking he would be able to help them explore its riches in the original Sanskrit. He had never read the Gita before and knew very little Sanskrit, but he studied it with them in Edwin Arnold's English translation, *The Song Celestial*, and it became the central Scripture of his life. He also read Arnold's study of the Buddha, *The Light of Asia*. Throughout the rest of his life he continued to deepen his understanding of Hinduism and to expand his knowledge and appreciation of other religions. His religious practices included meditation, prayer, singing, and scripture reading, using sources from Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, Jain, and Muslim traditions.

Gandhi's interpretation of Hinduism was selective. He identified core criteria by which he evaluated scriptures, theology, and religious practices, and on this basis he gave prominence to some texts and practices and marginalized others. For example, he focused on the elevated ideals and aspirations of Hinduism, while challenging many of its central practices like

[26] M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1966), 25-44.
[27] Ibid., 58.

untouchability and idol worship. Writing in his paper *Young India* in 1925, he characterized himself this way:

> I am not a literalist. Therefore I try to understand the spirit of the various scriptures of the world. I apply the test of satya [truth] and ahimsa [nonviolence] laid down by these very scriptures for their interpretation. I reject what is inconsistent with this test, and I appropriate all that is consistent with it.[28]

He applied these criteria even to his favorite scripture, the Bhagavad Gita, a small section of the Mahabharata, the massive epic poem recounting the conflict between two parts of the same family. The Gita is a subtle, extended argument to convince Arjuna, the commander of one of the armies, that it is his religious and social duty to lead his troops into battle against other members of his own family. Gandhi interpreted the Gita symbolically, arguing that it was a spiritual guide for the inner battle between good and evil within all humans, a battle that could only be won by assertive, selfless action. The Gita, he wrote, is "the book par excellence for the knowledge of Truth."[29]

Gandhi did not defend those aspects of Hinduism that led to the social evils he was trying to remove. He wrote in his autobiography that while he was struggling with his religious identity in South Africa he was unable to accept that Hinduism was the greatest religion because

> Hindu defects were pressingly visible to me. If untouchability could be a part of Hinduism, it could but be a rotten part or an excrescence. I could not understand the raison d'être of a multitude of sects and castes.[30]

But overall he counseled against offending or undermining the religious sensibilities of common people, who were still charmed and edified by temple rituals, pilgrimages, and devotional practices that he himself would not participate in. He argued, as countless Hindus have, that such practices reflected an immature stage of religious awareness but could become the

[28] Cited in Akeel Bilgrami, "Gandhi's Religion and its Relation to his Politics," *The Cambridge Companion to Gandhi* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011), 94.
[29] M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, 57.
[30] Ibid., 114.

building blocks for a much deeper religious understanding within the vast, rich expanse of Hinduism. Gandhi was convinced of the need to work within Hinduism as it was.[31]

Identifying with Hinduism was also a significant part of *swaraj* (self-rule). If India was to be independent politically, it must also be independent culturally and spiritually. If religious reform was needed, it would be defined and implemented by Hindus drawing from the profound resources of Hinduism.[32]

Gandhi's selective approach to Hinduism was very much like longstanding Mennonite selective responses to Christianity. When critics condemned established Christianity for its history of violence and domination, Mennonites joined in that criticism and at times stated flatly that those who perpetuated such violence were not true Christians at all. Mennonites made the life of Jesus, his teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, and his self-sacrificial death the normative framework for interpreting the rest of the Bible and for assessing the faithfulness of the Church through history.

Mennonites and Christianity

Mennonite missionaries came to India convinced that all people should be converted to the Christian faith. New converts would leave the religious traditions and practices in which they had been raised and would, as much as possible, adopt the religious beliefs and practices of the missionaries. These

[31] Gandhi's colleague Jawaharlal Nehru, who became India`s first Prime Minister, had little patience for popular religion of any kind, including Gandhi's regular devotional practices. He once told journalist Frank Moraes that the only time he could see Moraes during busy Congress Working Committee meetings was "during Gandhiji's prayer meeting. I'm never there." Frank Moraes, "Gandhi Ten Years After," *Foreign Affairs* 36, no. 2 (Jan. 1958): 259.

[32] Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, a major Indian political and social reformer, disagreed with Gandhi on this issue. Ambedkar was a Dalit (outcaste) who served for several years as Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution. He strongly and very publicly advocated the emancipation and elevation of the outcastes, insisting that this could happen only outside Hinduism. In 1935 he declared that while he was born a Hindu he was determined not to die a Hindu. For many years Christian missionaries and Indian Christian leaders lobbied for him to become a Christian. But in October 1956, only weeks before his death, he converted to Theravada Buddhism, along with about 500,000 of his followers.

assumptions were based on their theology and experience.[33] There was one God, who was revealed through the Bible, the only authoritative scripture. There was one, common humanity, created to be in a close relationship with God. The sin of Adam and Eve affected all humans. All were now alienated from God, inclined toward sin, destined for death. All were guilty of sin. But God was gracious and loving, and took the initiative to restore the relationship with humans through Jesus, the only Son of God and the Savior of the world. Those who accepted the love and forgiveness of God offered through Jesus were saved from sin, released from guilt, and destined for eternal life. They joined together as the Church, a separate, voluntary community of God's people, disciples of Jesus, a light to the world, a model of what the kingdom of God would be.

Mennonite worship was based on words – the words of Scripture, hymns, prayers, sermons, and teaching. It was iconoclastic and had minimal ritual and pageantry. Its leaders were not priests who mediated between the members and God. Rather, they were preachers and teachers, called from within the membership to serve others, chosen primarily for their ability to use words to elicit and nurture faith.

The impulses that brought Mennonite missionaries to India were reflected in the characteristics of Christian life that they emphasized. Christians were to preach the Gospel to all people, to baptize those who

[33] Mennonite convictions about Christian faith, mission, evangelism, and those of other faiths were sometimes systematically articulated in books such as G.W. Peters, *Foundations of Mennonite Brethren Missions* (Winnipeg, MB: Kindred Press, 1984), and in denominational confessions of faith. But most often they were assumed and merely alluded to with symbolic Bible verses, such as those regarded as "Great Commission" texts – Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-49; John 20:21; Acts 1:8. Missionary reports and periodic commemorative booklets nearly never articulated a cohesive theological framework, but usually assumed a commonly accepted theology and evoked it with specific biblical texts. Thus a booklet marking the 50th anniversary of MB mission in India contains nearly no biblical or theological reflection, but each of the three major sections opens with a Bible verse: John 20:21 – "As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you;" Luke 24:47 – "Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all nations;" Rev. 3:8 – "Behold I have set before thee a door opened, which none can shut." Missionary sermons and Bible teaching provide more detailed elaboration of the basic beliefs summarized here. It is evident from archival records of those sermons and Bible lessons that missionaries preached essentially the same theology in India and in North America.

became believers, to establish churches, to serve those in need, and to live peaceful lives. Conversion and separation from the world were fundamental characteristics of the Christian life. A Christian was a new person belonging to a new people. This would be expressed visibly in clothing, speech, interpersonal relationships, occupations, simple living, and nonresistance. Such separation could result in persecution. Mennonite missionaries had long memories of the persecution, martyrdom, and exile that their ancestors had experienced. Since most of the persecution had been at the hands of other Christians, Mennonites were often critical of other Christians and kept separate from them as well.

Mennonite missionaries expected converts to have a new identity and the Mennonite Church in India to be separate from the religious and cultural world in which it was established. They expected a radical disjunction between the life of Indians before and after conversion, and frequently cited such changes in converts' lives as proof of the transformative power of the Gospel. While some Christian missionaries (such as Catholics and Unitarians) explored the commonalities and continuities between the beliefs and practices of Hindus and Christians, Mennonites did not. Christian faith would not be built with either the foundations or ornamentations of Hinduism.

Gandhi and Christianity

It was in England, as a young law student, that Gandhi first developed friendships with Christians. They offered him hospitality in their homes and invited him to church. He attended churches frequently, including the Metropolitan Tabernacle where the famous Charles Spurgeon preached. He was initially most attracted to Christian vegetarians, many of whom were also social reformers. One of those friends gave him a Bible. He read it, and later wrote in his autobiography that while the chapters following the book of Genesis "invariably sent me to sleep," the Sermon on the Mount "went straight to my heart."[34] "My young mind tried to unify the teaching of the Gita, the Light of Asia and the Sermon on the Mount. That renunciation was the highest form of religion appealed to me greatly."[35]

[34] M. K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, 58.
[35] Ibid.

In South Africa and later in India Gandhi had many close Christian friends, most of whom prayed for his conversion, gave him books arguing for the truth of Christianity, and frequently urged him to become a Christian. A good number of them also wrote about his profound impact on their lives. During his time in South Africa, one of his British friends sent him Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You*. Gandhi wrote that the "independent thinking, profound morality, and the truthfulness" of this book "overwhelmed me. It left an abiding impression on me."[36] It reinforced the conclusion he had reached when he first read the Bible years earlier: the Sermon on the Mount was at the center of the message of Jesus and should be at the center of Christianity.[37]

Gandhi incorporated Bible reading and Christian hymns and prayers into both his own religious practices and the life of the communities (ashrams) that he established in South Africa and India. Two of his favorite hymns sung regularly in these communities were "Lead, Kindly Light" and "Take My Life and Let it Be Consecrated, Lord, to Thee." But there was much in the Bible and Christianity that he could not accept. He objected to the Christian teaching that humans are inherently sinful. He agreed that humans live in a society filled with sinfulness, and in that sense humans are "born in sin," but he did not agree that this was a necessary and defining characteristic of humanity. In a conversation with his Plymouth Brethren friend Michael Coates, Gandhi said, "I do not seek redemption from the consequences of my sin. I seek to be redeemed from sin itself."[38] His friend warned him that this would be a fruitless quest, for sin was inherent in human nature. In a 1925 address to missionaries, Gandhi said, "One of the greatest of Christian divines, Bishop Heber, wrote the two lines which have always left a sting in me: 'Where every prospect pleases and only man is vile.' I wish he had not written them . . . [Man] is not vile. He is as much a seeker after truth as you and I are, possibly more so."[39]

Because he did not accept the inherent sinfulness/evil of humans,

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[36] Ibid., 114.

[37] Ibid., 112-15.

[38] Ibid., 103-04.

[39] Reported in *Young India*, August 6, 1925. Cited in Robert Ellsberg, ed., *Gandhi on Christianity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 35. The lines are from the second stanza of the missionary hymn "From Greenland's Icy Mountains."

Gandhi did not accept that the death of Jesus was atonement for the sins of others. Our sins were our own responsibility and could not be removed by the action of another, but only through our own disciplined life of virtue, self-restraint, service to others, and nonviolence. Although Gandhi did not interpret Jesus from a Christian perspective, he admired Jesus and often spoke and wrote about him.

> I regard Jesus as a great teacher of humanity, but I do not regard him as the only begotten son of God…. Metaphorically we are all begotten sons of God…. Jesus came as near to perfection as possible. To say that he was perfect is to deny God's superiority to man….[40]

> He was one of the greatest teachers humanity has ever had…. In Jesus' own life is the key to His nearness to God; that He expressed, as no other could, the spirit and will of God. It is this sense that I see Him and recognize Him as the son of God…. And because the life of Jesus has the significance and the transcendency to which I have alluded, I believe that He belongs not solely to Christianity but to the entire world; to all races and people, it matters little under what flag, name, or doctrine they may work, profess a faith, or worship a God inherited from their ancestors.[41]

For all of his appreciation for Jesus, the Sermon on the Mount, and the New Testament, or perhaps because of it, Gandhi had significant criticisms of Christianity. Many were the same criticisms expressed by Mennonites. Writing in the *Harijan* in 1936 he clearly reflected the anti-Constantinianism that has almost become a litmus test for Mennonite theologians; he said that orthodox Christianity had "distorted the message of Jesus" and that "when it had the backing of a Roman Emperor it became the imperialist faith as it remains to this day."[42] Writing in *Young India* in 1920 he commented, "Europe is today only nominally Christian. It is really worshipping Mammon."[43]

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[40] *Harijan*, April 17, 1937, cited in Ellsberg, 26.
[41] *The Modern Review*, October 1941, cited in Ellsberg, 27-28.
[42] *Harijan*, January 7, 1939, cited in Ellsberg, 25-26.
[43] *Young India*, September 8, 1920, cited in Ellsberg, 32.

Gandhi was a persistent critic of Christian conversion. He wrote about it frequently and discussed it with Indian Christians and missionaries on countless occasions. He wrote that he supported conversion "in the sense of self-purification, self-realization . . . the crying need of the times. . . . [but] To those who would convert India, might it not be said: 'Physician, heal thyself!'"[44]

Gandhi supported the right of everyone "freely to profess, practice and propagate religion," which is how such rights are now defined in the Indian Constitution. But he opposed conversion from one religion to another in principle and practice. The principle he expressed was that all religious traditions had within them the resources to stimulate spiritual inquiry, to experience God, and to provide the basis for a life of selflessness, nonviolence, and generosity. But all religions were limited. None could fully express the divine and none was the only path to spiritual fulfillment. None could be the arbiter of the others. When a person from one religious tradition experienced the riches of another, it was best to add rather than to replace. There should be not only mutual respect among religions but mutual enrichment. He often said that in the encounter between people of different faiths it should be the intention of a Christian, for example, to help the Hindu to be a better Hindu, and the Hindu should aspire to help the Christian be a better Christian. In this regard he thanked his Christian friends for the path of inter-religious discovery they had started him on, even though it had not led him to conversion as they had hoped.[45] Gandhi was, to use today's language, a highly informed "religious pluralist."

His second objection to conversion was that many Indian Christians had become Europeanized in dress, food, language, and social habits, and spoke abusively about Hinduism. In South Africa he learned that many young educated Indian Christians were not supporting the legal rights of other Indians because "they are under the thumb of the white clergymen, who in their turn are subject to the Government." He wondered, "Was this the meaning of Christianity? Did they cease to be Indians because they had become Christians?"[46] In 1925 he wrote, "Is it not deplorable that many

[44] *Young India*, April 23, 1931, cited in Ellsberg, 45.
[45] M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, 115.
[46] Ibid., 115-16.

Christian Indians discard their own mother tongue, bring up their children only to speak in English?"[47] While Mennonite and other missionaries usually took the change in lifestyle among converts to be a sign of transformation by the Spirit of God, Gandhi saw many of the changes as imitations of the "superficialities of European civilization."[48] But he also noted gratefully, "I know that there is a marvelous change coming over Indian Christians. There is on the part of a large number of them a longing to revert to original simplicity, a longing to belong to the nation and to serve it, but the process is slow."[49] We must remember that this debate about religious and cultural identity took place in the middle of a massive political agitation for *swaraj*, self-rule.

Gandhi's third objection was based on his experience of Christians supporting and blessing war. M.C. Lehman recounted this conversation with Gandhi in his ashram in Sabarmuti in 1929:[50]

> Seated squat on the floor of his little mud office in his office at Sabarmuti I asked Gandhi in 1929 what was his attitude toward Christianity. Clad only in his loin cloth and large horn rimmed spectacles, Gandhi stretched out his bony finger and shook with sarcasm as his eyes flashed at me and he said. "Lehman Sahib, I would be ashamed to be a Christian." Pressed for reasons Gandhi continued, "I went to the World War as a stretcher bearer. Many of my Hindu co-religionists were in the ranks. But we Hindus think and act more honestly as to war. We know war is wrong and cannot be religiously blessed and so we are honest enough to leave our priests at home. You are so inconsistent as to take chaplains along to bless wholesale murder. I helped carry the mutilated bodies of so-called Christian Germans and Englishmen who had stabbed and shot each other and blown each other to pieces. I saw you demolish each other's churches and cathedrals." And then his lips quivered as he continued, "I saw your so-called Christian soldiers charge across no-man's

[47] *Young India*, August 20, 1925, cited in Ellsberg, 39.
[48] *Young India*, December 17, 1925, cited in Ellsberg, 40.
[49] *Young India*, August 20, 1925, cited in Ellsberg, 39.
[50] *Goshen College Bulletin* 30, no. 5 (1936): 12.

> land with bayonets sharp and set to disembowel each other and they were led in their hellish work by a standard bearer who carried a standard on which was emblazoned the cross of the Prince of Peace. I would be ashamed to be a Christian."

Nonviolence and Non-resistance

Mennonites and Gandhi agreed that a nonviolent/non-resistant life needed to be grounded spiritually. Mennonites said that non-resistance was not natural for humans, who were naturally inclined to sin and violence. Non-resistance was the result of a radical reorientation, a conversion brought about by an encounter with God through Jesus Christ. Non-resistance, as taught and modeled by Jesus, was possible only because of the indwelling Spirit of God that empowered people who had experienced the new birth.[51]

Gandhi grounded nonviolence on two premises. First, human nature is fundamentally good. Nonviolence can spark recognition, respect, and ultimately cooperation in the adversary. Satyagraha[52] assumes that the opponent's conscience will respond positively to nonviolent efforts to bring about justice. Second, the foundation of nonviolence is not a specific religion, but reliance on God.

> [Gandhi] was too much of an ecumenist to imply that this was a Hindu struggle, or a Hindu and Muslim struggle, or a struggle against people who happened to be Christians. He called it a religious struggle because of the sacrifice his followers, his satyagrahis, were prepared to make. It was another way of insisting that their motives were pure and disinterested….[53]

As Gandhi himself once put it, "To bear all sorts of tortures without a murmur of resentment is impossible for a human being without the strength that comes from God."[54] The true satyagrahi is purified and strengthened through spiritual resources and ethical practices.

Mennonites and Gandhi both stated that non-resistance or

[51] Groff, *Satyagraha and Nonresistance*, 155.
[52] He used the term "passive resistance" till 1908.
[53] Lelyveld, 126-27.
[54] *Harijan*, June 3, 1936, cited in M K. Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, 364.

nonviolence were not merely instrumental, not tactics to be abandoned if unsuccessful. They were not, as we say today, just some of many tools in the toolbox. However, Mennonites argued that Gandhi's approach really was instrumental, since he at times acknowledged there could be occasions when a violent response would be appropriate. He offered to support the British war effort in World War II in return for assurance that India would receive independence when the war was successfully concluded. Then in August 1942 he helped formulate the "Quit India" resolution which stated that a free India would "resist aggression with all of the armed as well as nonviolent forces at its command." For Mennonites, those positions were incompatible with non-resistance.

There were other differences. Mennonites in India and America often expressed discomfort and concern about the adversarial, confrontational non-cooperation campaigns that Gandhi led. These "agitations," as they sometimes called them, were provocative. Whether the violence that resulted was initiated by protestors or authorities, the non-cooperation campaign itself had to accept responsibility for inciting it. Many American pacifists shared this concern. Civil disobedience did not seem to them to reflect the goodwill and love that should be the motivating spirit behind social reconciliation.[55]

Missionary M.C. Lehman, who had interviewed Gandhi several years earlier, expressed these concerns in a 1936 article in the Alumni Newsletter of the *Goshen College Bulletin*.[56] He wrote that Gandhi's work was "a process designed to exhaust." It was "retaliatory" and a "coercive force of mass collective representation and obstruction." Protests that resulted in a violent response by the police and army were "an artificial set-up."

When Guy Franklin Hershberger wrote his landmark *War, Peace and Nonresistance* in 1944, he took the same point of view. His main criticism of Gandhi's nonviolent resistance was that its purpose was to seek justice, redress for grievances, and political change.[57] That seems self-evident and hardly controversial today, less than two years after the demonstrations

[55] Leilah C. Danielson, "'In My Extremity I Turned to Gandhi': American Pacifists, Christianity and Gandhian Nonviolence, 1915-1941," *Church History* 72 (2003): 361-88.
[56] *Goshen College Bulletin* 30, no. 5 (1936).
[57] Guy Franklin Hershberger, *War, Peace, and Nonresistance* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1969), 190-91.

and political transformations of the "Arab Spring."[58] But Hershberger and Mennonite missionaries in India demanded a disinterested non-resistance that was simply obedience to God and a strong symbol of separation from the world. As Lehman put it in the *Goshen College Bulletin*,

> What then is the nature of the New Testament attitude toward evil and how to overcome it? This attitude is one of non-participation in and non-association with evil and of clear testimony against it by precept and example. "Come ye out from among them and be ye separate saith the Lord." II Cor. 6:17.[59]

Gandhi, for his part, often argued that non-resistance or pacifism was largely the strategy of the weak who had few options and would gladly have used violence if they thought it could be successful.[60] Passive resistance was negative, but satyagraha was an active principle: "Love those that despitefully use you." Satyagraha intended to move the heart and to lift up rather than to destroy the adversary.[61]

Gandhi's position was close to Tolstoy's, who wrote this dialogue in *The Kingdom of God is Within You*:

> Q. Ought the word "non-resistance" to be taken in its widest sense – that is to say, as intending that we should not offer any resistance of any kind to evil?
>
> A. No; it ought to be taken in the exact sense of our Savior's

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[58] The change in Mennonite understanding, activism, and language is exemplified by the Fall 2011 issue of *The Conrad Grebel Review*, which focuses on the "Warsaw Lectures" presented by John Howard Yoder in 1983. The article by David Cortright, "Toward Realistic Pacifism: John Howard Yoder and the Theory and Practice of Nonviolent Peacemaking" (pages 54-72) examines the impact of the teachings of Jesus on Gandhi and the development of the nonviolent method. The use of the terms "nonviolent peacemaking" and "nonviolent action" indicates how far the current discussion has moved from the separatist pacifist emphasis in Hershberger. In the section "The Success of Nonviolent Action," Cortright identifies some of the apparent successes of "organized nonviolence" and includes among these the 2011 "unarmed revolutions" in Egypt and Tunisia.

[59] *Goshen College Bulletin* 30, no. 5 (1936).

[60] *Young India*, March 23, 1921, cited in M.K. Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, 3.

[61] Stuart Nelson, "Gandhian Concept of Non-Violence," in *Non-Violence and Social Change,* J. S. Mathur, ed. (Ahmedabad, India: Navajivan Publishing House, 1977), 108.

> teaching – that is, not repaying evil for evil. We ought to oppose evil by every righteous means in our power, but not by evil.

Gandhi insisted that evil, oppression, injustice, or exploitation must be resisted, but by using means that exemplified the truth and virtue of the satyagrahi's cause. It was possible to demonstrate good will toward opponents, to cooperate on common causes, even while continuing to resist what was evil. If the goal of violence was to suppress or eliminate the opponent, the goal of nonviolence was to create an ally. But despite their good intentions, satyagrahis should expect to pay a price for non-cooperation and resistance; they should be ready for suffering and punishment when they resisted the law and those in power, and for disappointment when their cause or they themselves failed. In fact, an essential feature of satyagraha was to invite suffering on oneself and thereby to appeal to the opponent's conscience. This required rigorous preparation. Crowds involved in nonviolent action must behave like "disciplined soldiers."[62] Nonviolence was the lifestyle of the brave and committed. As Gandhi put it, "I believe in war bereft of every trace of violence."[63]

But what if there was a war, a war with violence? What would the situation of Mennonite Christians in India be? As Independence drew closer, this became an urgent question. And that is what set in motion the correspondence that led to the enigmatic postcard that Gandhi sent to James Norman Kaufman in June 1947.

Kaufman and P. J. Malagar (later Bishop Malagar) were commissioned by the Mennonite Church in India to write a letter to several Indian leaders in the weeks before Independence, requesting exemption from military service. On June 21, 1947 they wrote:

> It is our understanding that the Constitution for independent India is now in the making. While there is opportunity, we wish to make petition on behalf of the Mennonite Church, asking

[62] *Young India*, August 8, 1921.

[63] *Harijan*, May 14, 1938. As noted earlier, Gandhi insisted that this nonviolent, suffering-resistant discipline was rooted in reliance on God. Yoder similarly grounds it in a "religious community discipline," a "religious vision," and a "distinctive spirituality." See Cortright, "Toward Realistic Pacifism: John Howard Yoder and the Theory and Practice of Nonviolent Peacemaking," 67-68.

> for a provision in the new Constitution guaranteeing to us, as well as to other religious groups holding views similar to our own, a degree of religious liberty. We as a Mennonite people are conscientiously opposed to militarism in general and to war in particular. This position is made clear herewith for your information and reference. We do not seek to evade the duties of responsible citizenship. On the contrary we hereby express our willingness at all times to render civilian public service of national importance in lieu of war service should the calamity of war again overtake our country.[64]

The letter was acknowledged by staff in the offices of most of the leaders. But nine days later Gandhi replied by postcard in his own handwriting: "Your letter. Why worry! I am in the same boat with you. Yours sincerely, M.K. Gandhi."

What did Gandhi mean? What boat? I assume that he meant that if there was a war, and if Indian citizens were conscripted into military service, he and the Mennonites would be on the same side of the issue and share the same treatment. The Indian Constitution does not refer to or include a specific provision for conscientious objection, but there is explicit recognition of freedom of religion in Part III, "Fundamental Rights." Although India has fought three wars with Pakistan, two protracted border battles with China in the high Himalayas, and an ongoing insurrection in Kashmir, it has an all-volunteer army and has never seriously considered conscription. Religious identity and convictions are not factors. From that perspective, all Indians are in the same boat.

This postcard from Gandhi is a highly prized artifact. It is in Box 1, File 22 of the James Norman Kaufman collection of the Mennonite Church USA Archives in Goshen, Indiana. Actually it is not really there. Only a copy of it is in that file, with a note advising the reader that the original is in the care of the archivist. The archivist brought it to me, in its own folder, within a protective sleeve, and I was allowed to hold it and read it.

There are two other artifacts in the Goshen Archives, not directly from Gandhi but marking the end of his life by an assassin's bullets on January

[64] Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India, 1897-1962*, 92-93.

30, 1948. One is in the records of Aldine Carpenter Brunk and Eva Harder Brunk, who left India just months before Gandhi's death, after more than thirty years of missionary service. It is a torn copy of the Goshen newspaper, *The News-Democrat*, dated January 30, 1948. The front page headline shouts "Mahatma Gandhi Assassinated." More than two pages are dedicated to Gandhi's death earlier that day in a garden in Delhi and to the story of his remarkable life.

The other is in the files of Joseph Daniel and Minnie Graber, missionaries in India from 1925 to 1942. It is a copy of a Memorial Service honoring Mahatma Gandhi held at The Community Church in New York City on February 1, 1948.[65] The service included readings from the Gita, poetry, a tribute to Gandhi, ecumenical prayers, and the hymn "Take My Life and Let it Be Consecrated, Lord, to Thee." The final prayer ended with the Biblical words, "And so may the peace of God which passeth all understanding, that peace which the world can neither give nor yet take away, rest upon your minds and hearts this day and evermore. Amen."

Soon after Gandhi's death the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities sent a letter of condolence to the Indian Embassy in Washington and also issued this statement:

> No one interested in India could help but be profoundly saddened by Gandhi's tragic death on January 30. Although not a Christian, he held Christ and His teachings in great respect. He was always a restraining influence on violence in that country. Let us pray that even after his death Christ's people in India may lead a quiet and peaceable life so that the purposes of God may be realized who will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.[66]

On February 10, 1948 J.D. Graber began his "Today in Mission" column in the *Gospel Herald* with the words "Gandhi is dead." He wrote:

> Gandhi was not a Christian, but he lived out a spirit of sincerity and devotion to a cause that puts most Christians to shame.

[65] J. D. and Minnie Graber Collection, Hist.Mss.1-503, Box 1, File 11, Mennonite Church USA Archives–Goshen, Goshen, IN.
[66] *Gospel Herald* 41, no. 6 (February 10, 1948): 133.

> And the principles by which he lived are in large part Christian principles that most of us are not courageous enough to live out.

Those principles, Graber continued, were based on Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount, a part of the Bible that Gandhi cherished. He encouraged his readers to reaffirm their own commitment to peace as taught in that Sermon.

Gandhi, the Hindu, helping Mennonites to be better Christians. He would have been pleased.

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