



Roman Faces; photo, Jim Kenney

Editors' Page

Gandhi's Search for Truth and Religious Dialogue

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The most remarkable aspect of Gandhi's life is his dedication to the search for Truth. "Truth became my sole objective," he wrote. "It began to grow in magnitude everyday and my definition of it has been ever widening." He started with the conviction that God is Truth; later he declared that Truth is God. For him truth meant more than mere truthfulness; it signified eternal being. The different ways through which human beings pursued truth interested him exceedingly. Life is an experiment in which humans ought to discover the ever more comprehensive truth. Gandhi did not stop at seeking or discovering truth. He proceeded to establish it in terms of justice and fair play for all. In this way he brought home to everyone the religious spirit, not in theological language but in the language of daily life and truthful living.

Gandhi's purpose in dialogue was not the elimination of religious differences, but the appreciation of the other's faith and practice, leading to cooperation in different spheres of life. He sought to understand both the similarities and the differences. He was impressed by the fact that moral and

spiritual values are embraced by all religious traditions. Each teaches that person to person relationships are more important than relations to material things. They all emphasize that service to the poor and the sick, the helpless and the oppressed is service to the One. In the eternal struggle between good and evil, all religions are called upon to take sides with the good and raise humanity to a higher moral level. In this sense, the success of any one religion is the success of all religions. It is only natural to expect, therefore, that different religions should cooperate with one another in addressing these problems.

Gandhi was aware, on the other hand, of the characteristic differences between the great religions arising from historical and cultural backgrounds. They do not prescribe the same rituals and customs or subscribe to the same myths and doctrines. He discouraged all attempts to root out these differences. Actually, he welcomed the enrichment that comes from religious diversity. He wanted all people to maintain their symbols of identity. He emphasized the need for respectful dialogue among the adherents of different religions.

In his own day, Gandhi was confronted with strained relations between Hindus and Muslims. Hatred and suspicion had poisoned the atmosphere. Bloody religious riots were frequent. The growing tensions between the two communities distressed Gandhi a great deal. He deplored these developments. He pleaded and prayed and fasted for religious harmony. In fact, during the last decades of his life, his major preoccupation was harmony between Hindus and Muslims. He pleaded with the Hindu majority to treat the Muslim minority with justice and fairness. He went from place to place, meeting Hindus and Muslims and proclaiming the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. He said to the people: "God is One; Allah and Rama are His names." He sought to heal the wounds that people, in their religious frenzy, were inflicting on themselves.

The problem of interreligious relations has become an urgent world problem today. Gandhi wanted harmony and friendship to be established not merely between the Hindus and Muslims but among the adherents of all the great religions. In the context of the emerging global community, all the great religions are useful, necessary, and complementary to one another, revealing different facets infinite Truth. Gandhi believed that all the world religions are God-given and that they serve the people to whom they are revealed. He was inwardly receptive to the currents of Truth coming from great religions of the world. He held that each religion must bring its individual contribution to humanity's understand-

ing of the moral and spiritual world. To ignore any of them meant to ignore God's infinite richness, and impoverish humanity spiritually. God's love embraces the whole world.

EDITORS' ANNOUNCEMENT

Interreligious Insight, like so many publications, has struggled financially in the current period of economic downturn. As a result, we have made the difficult decision to reduce our annual printing schedule to three issues, March, July, and November, beginning with the current issue. Thus, 2010 will feature the January, July, and November issues. Beginning in 2011, we'll publish in March, July, and November.

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