

ASIAN

HO RIZO NS

Vol. 4, No. 2, December 2010

Book Review

Terrence J. Rynne, *Gandhi and Jesus: the Saving Power of Nonviolence*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2009 (reprinted). Pages: ix+228. ISBN: 81-7086-498-4.

Gandhi and Jesus: The Saving Power of Nonviolence, by Terrence J. Rynne, is a worthy contribution to the world where many quarrel with each other in the name of caste, creed, colour, etc. The author is bringing the attention of the people to the core of the teachings of Jesus Christ – Sermon on the Mount – and the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, which is Satyagraha. Both teachings are based on one basic principle: Love. By following the way of the nonviolent love as the way of life, the whole humanity can live with fraternity. This book contains five chapters, an introduction and a conclusion.

The first chapter is titled “Mohandas Gandhi: A Hindu and More.” It explains that Gandhi was a strong Hindu but at the same time he paid respect for other religions. He tried to understand other religions. Understanding another religion requires, as Gandhi has described it, a “passing over,” a letting oneself see the world through the other person’s religious eyes. Gandhi was very much influenced by the good examples of his mother in terms of pious religious practices and his father’s open mindedness to the people of other religions. He was totally dedicated to building harmonious relation with other religions. He used to read the Holy books of other religions too. He was open to truths wherever it was found. The three persons who influenced Gandhi very much were Tolstoy, Raychand and Ruskin. Their writings gave his thoughts an extra input.

The second chapter explains the Gandhian notion of Satyagraha. Gandhi’s concept of Satyagraha contains a rich meaning. He makes a difference between “Passive resistance” and Satyagraha. In passive resistance people may have the feeling that they are weak. But in Satyagraha people are aware of their strength and try to achieve their goal by means of no-violence. There is no love in passive resistance. The Satyagraha has a great miraculous power to win over the enemies. According to Gandhi world exists today because of the power of ahimsa.

The third chapter is named, “Selected Christian Theologians Who Have Embraced Nonviolence.” They are Charles Freer Andrews, John Howard Yoder, Bernard Häring and Walter Wink. They have been heavily influenced by Gandhi and his teaching on

Satyagraha. C. F. Andrews was very much associated with Gandhi. He was one of Gandhi's closest friends, a partner in praxis and theory. Andrews's book, *The Sermon on the Mount*, is the work that most fully sets forth his basic understanding of Christian nonviolence. Yoder evidences full-fledged respect for Gandhi in ways that shape and sharpen his own understanding of the way of nonviolence. Bernard Häring, a Redemptorist Catholic priest, after experiencing the bitter experience of war, says: "emerged ... the vocation to work for the cause of peace and the healing power of nonviolence ... all should enrol themselves among the apostles for the healing power of nonviolence as the way to peace." When he was misunderstood by church authorities, he confronted the situation with satyagraha, a powerful tool to deal. Walter Wink speaks about Jesus' third way. Gandhi helped Wink to understand that nonviolence is the opposite of passivity in the face of evil, and that it takes more courage to be nonviolent than it takes to be violent.

The title given to the fourth chapter is "The Multiple Versions of Salvation Theologies." It deals with multiple models of salvation theories developed through centuries, giving special attention to the most commonly used model, Anselm's satisfaction theory. As per Anselm by original sin humanity fell in a deep pit and powerless to climb out of it. It is an offence against God. It is ratified by the greatest sacrifice of the Son of God who obeyed the will of God. The credit of the death of Jesus brought humanity salvation. Satisfaction is made by an innocent, infinite God-man, and the merit is transferred to humanity. But these points were vehemently criticised by Joseph Ratzinger and Avery Dulles. The theory projected a God who needs to be satisfied by the blood of his son. Some of the hallmarks for the contemporary soteriology are also mentioned in this chapter.

The fifth and final chapter is titled "Rethinking Christian Salvation in the Light of Gandhi's Satyagraha." It gives answer for many questions. It deals with human responsibility for history, the life, actions and teachings of Jesus as the ultimate criterion for evaluating approaches to salvation, the meaning of Christ's death and of "carrying the cross," the priority of praxis over theory, the way of nonviolence: the calling of a disciple of Jesus, the importance of the church for salvation and the mission of nonviolence.

The book concludes by proposing an outline for an approach to Christian salvation that is at once faithful to the scriptures and responsive to contemporary needs and sensibilities. Definitely it will serve as a handbook for those who love and promote truth and non-violence.

Roy Vettikuzhiyil, CMI (royvetticmi@yahoo.co.in)

Lecturer (Philosophy), Faculty of Philosophy, DVK, Bangalore