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Reconciliation A Gandhian Perspective

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Abstract: After situating the unimaginable violence during the independence and partition of India, the author traces the significant and prophetic role played by Gandhi in bringing about reconciliation between the Hindus and the Muslims, which is relevant for our present India. For the establishment of peace, the spiritual strength that Gandhi drew from religions cannot be underestimated.

Keywords: Gandhi, Indian Independence, Partition Hindus, Muslims.

On 9th August 1947, Gandhi arrived in Calcutta “which was in the grip of communal riots” (Gandhi 1959: 20). He believed that “an ounce of practice is worth tons of speeches and writings” (CWMG 1958-1984: vol. 89, 31). Hence, he gets in touch with Hindu and Muslim leaders and pleads with them to do their best to restore peace. He walked or drove through the streets of Calcutta in the company of Suhrawardy, the former Prime Minister of Bengal, both appealing to Hindus and Muslims to shun violence and work for peace. Slowly things improved. “After 14th August no disturbances were reported in Calcutta. Gandhi had calmed the storm. The press paid tributes to the magician in loincloth” (Fischer 1982: 392). On the 15th “men and women were going round hand in hand, shouting, ‘Hindu-Muslim Bhai Bhai’.. People of both communities visited each other’s place of worship” (Gandhi 1959: 33). Commenting on this situation Suhrawardy remarked: “What a wonderful result of only one day’s penance on the part of the Mahatma. The entire city is peaceful as if nothing had happened” (Gandhi 1959: 31).

A Nine-day Wonder

This peace was very fragile. Soon there were signs of unrest. On the night of 31st August some Muslims were killed. The place where Gandhi was resting was attacked. Soon there was a major conflagration. Gandhi tried to pacify the crowd, which believed that he was sheltering some Muslims. The next morning Gandhi wrote to Vallabhbhai Patel: "What was regarded as a miracle has proved a short-lived nine-day wonder" (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 133). After due reflection and prayer he makes a statement to the press on 1st September:

To put an appearance before a yelling crowd does not always work. It certainly did not last night. What my word in person cannot do my fast may. It may touch the hearts of all the warring elements even in the Punjab if it does in Calcutta. I therefore begin fasting from 8.15 p.m. to end only if and when sanity returns to Calcutta (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 132).

When a visitor asked him whether his community could offer him some help, Gandhi told him: "As long as I myself do not take any step, I have no right to tender any sort of advice to others" (Gandhi 1959: 70). Many prominent Hindus and Muslims pleaded with Gandhi not to undertake the fast. They were not only anxious about his health but also realized that were he to die hell would be let loose. Gandhi stuck to his conditions: not promises of peace, but the reality of peace. He told them: "Let evil-doers desist from evil, not to save my life, but as a result of a true heart-change" (Pyarelal 1958: 418). Gandhi's well-wishers did their best to give the greatest possible publicity to his fast. Gandhi had begun his fast on 1st September and now it was the 4th. Responding to the plea of the visitors to put an end to his fast, Gandhi put two sets of questions to them:

(1) Can you in all sincerity assure me that there never will be repetition of trouble in Calcutta? Can you say that there is a genuine change of heart among the citizens so that they will no longer tolerate, much less foster, communal frenzy?.. (2) If trouble breaks out, since you are not omnipotent or even omniscient, would you give your word of honour that you would not live to report failure but lay down your life in the attempt to protect those whose safety you are pledging? (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 152)

Prominent religious leaders gathered together and, after some discussion, drafted a pledge indicating their acceptance of the conditions implied in Gandhi's questions.

Then the miracle happened. As the hours crept by and slowly life ebbed out of the frail little man on the fasting bed, it caused a deep heart churning in all concerned, bringing the hidden lie to the surface. People came and confessed to him what they would have confided to no mortal ear. Hindus and Muslims combined in an all-out effort to save the precious life that was being offered as ransom for disrupted peace between brother and brother. Mixed processions consisting of all communities paraded through the affected part of the city to restore communal harmony (Pyarelal 1958: 419).

Gandhi ended his fast at 9.15 p.m. on the 4th. Once again something most unexpected happened. "From that day onwards, through the many months when Punjab and other provinces shook with religious massacres, Calcutta and most parts of Bengal remained riot-free. Bengal remained true to its plighted word" (Fischer 1982: 593-94). In this article I try to answer two questions: What was it that made Gandhi's efforts at reconciliation so effective? What is it that we Christians can learn from his experiments and experiences?¹

Gifting One's Life

In accepting to be a mediator between two warring groups, Gandhi risked his life. Any person belonging to either party could kill him, and thus generate a very tragic outburst of communal violence. When he reached Calcutta he was greeted by an "excited crowd of young men... They shouted: 'Why have you come here?'" (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 33; footnote 1). Gandhi refused to budge, and told them: "I am going to put myself under your protection. You are welcome to turn against me and play the opposite role if you choose... You can obstruct my work, even kill me. I won't invoke the help of the police" (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 33-34). Gandhi, a person "who desires to trust others" (Gandhi 1959: 51), told them that he wished that they all would also have this trust in the others, the more so if the others constitute the majority: "There is no occasion to distrust the majority in either Dominion" (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 13). He had been cautioned by many but he "was unaffected by the warnings" (*CWMG*, vol. 89:

43). While in Calcutta he was living in a Muslim area, and Muslim volunteers were attending to his needs (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 48).

Gandhi valued communal harmony so much that he was prepared to lay down his life for it: “What is the use of my living? If I lack even the power to pacify the people, what else is left for me to do?” (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 134). Reconciliation is a process which involves not only our mind but also and much more so our heart. Gandhi fasts in order to “appeal to everybody to search his heart. It should result in all-round purification” (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 137). It is possible that people may not be moved by his appeal for peace, but his fast “may touch all the warring elements” (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 132). Reconciliation demands action, and so Gandhi tells us that his purpose in fasting “is to purify, to release our energy by overcoming our inertia and mental sluggishness, not to paralyse us or to render us inactive. My fast isolates the forces of evil; the moment they are isolated they die, for evil by itself has no legs to stand upon” (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 150).

Gandhi is aware that some consider his fast a pressure tactic. Regarding his fast at Pune with reference to the Communal Award some told him

that though the amendment [made by Gandhi] was not to their desire, they accepted it for the sake of saving his life... [but Gandhi says] This was wholly a wrong approach... Truth could not be sacrificed even for the sake of saving a life, however precious it was (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 148).

Some suggested that a photo of Gandhi fasting would help to restore peace. Gandhi objected: “I do not want to terminate my fast by making use of my picture in this way. The fast should end only when the people are convinced that what they have been doing is wrong” (Gandhi 1959: 86). Some Muslim friends told Gandhi: “God forbid, that anything should happen to you. If so, a great catastrophe will befall us.” To this Gandhi replied: “You need not explain all this to me” (Gandhi 1959: 87).²

Transcending the Past

Reconciliation is possible only if the parties involved are prepared to forgive one another, because very rarely do we have a vio-

lent situation which is fully the responsibility of one party alone. On the other hand if both the parties start justifying themselves and blaming the other, the process will never end, because seldom do we come across persons who are totally 'neutral'. This is even true of people who involved in violence. Gandhi is quite aware of this human reality. He tells the representatives of one party: "It will profit you nothing to remember old wrongs and nurse old enmities" (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 34). We need to begin anew, but this is possible only if we "are able to forget the past. We know how all over the world enemies have become fast friends" (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 88).

The way Gandhi went about in Calcutta shows how he himself practised what he preached. When the Muslim League decided to observe 16th August, 1946, as the Direct Action Day, violence broke out in Noakhali in Bengal. The then Chief Minister of Bengal, Shaheed Suhrawardy, was held responsible, if not by commission, then at least by omission. As Pyarelal puts it, he "had been sowing the proverbial dragon's teeth" in Bengal (Pyarelal 1958: 36). Manubehn Gandhi reports that some Hindu demonstrators asked Suhrawardy whether he was responsible "for the great massacre of 16th August 1946." First he tried to disclaim total responsibility, but when the demonstrators told him that he was evading the question, he "finally admitted that he alone was responsible..." (Gandhi 1959: 30). Gandhi was informed either verbally or through letters that Suhrawardy "was not to be trusted and that Hindus had suffered a lot during the tenure of his ministry" (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 81). Hence when Gandhi co-opts him as his partner in the reconciliatory process, he is fully aware that this was "no small gain" (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 34). In doing this Gandhi not only got the support of those Muslims who accepted Suhrawardy as their leader and spokesperson, but also gave a very powerful demonstration of how people of different faith traditions can work together for peace.³ Moreover, "due to his old association with the Pakistani leaders, Shaheed had a certain initial advantage which he could turn to good account, if he set about the business in the right spirit and in the right way" (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 200). Gandhi made Suhrawardy so much part of his involvement in the peace process that were anybody to insult Suhrawardy he would be insulting Gandhi (Gandhi 1959: 29).

In like manner Gandhi wanted to co-opt those Hindu leaders who appeared to the Muslims to be guilty of communal provocation. Gandhi was aware that “everyone suspects the Hindu Mahasabha...” (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 127). Even then when some ministers of West Bengal informed him that they intended to arrest some Hindu Mahasabha leaders, Gandhi replied: “You should not arrest them. Throw the responsibility on their heads. Ask them what they want, peace or riots. Tell them that you want their help. See what reply they give” (Gandhi 1959: 67). In all this Gandhi is inviting all concerned to rely on the deeper powers within us. Hence his plea: “I would appeal to you to have faith, for faith generates faith and suspicion gives rise to suspicion. Keep on strengthening your faith” (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 244). Gandhi was appealing to his fellow citizens to work with faith and mutual trust.

Changing the Present

Reconciliation presupposes mutual understanding. For this both the parties need to speak a language that is understood by the other. Hence Gandhi insists that the Muslims “have to make their Urdu simple. Similarly the Hindus will have to make Hindi more simple. Only then can the two communities understand each other” (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 1). There is, however, the need for a deeper purification, a purification of the heart. A community, that has discrimination and disdain for others built into it, needs to change. Gandhi reminds the Hindus that “We kept the fifth *varna* segregated from us. We kept their food separate and declared that they could not live in our midst. We decided to treat them as our slaves. Later they turned to Islam” (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 263). This also points to the fact that “the Muslims in this country are all our blood brothers... We must consider why they were drawn to Islam” (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 263). Hence “the Hindus have to purify themselves by eschewing untouchability and caste differences. Similarly, Muslims have to purify themselves by giving up their hatred of Hindus” (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 34). Purification implies a change of attitude towards the other, and hence giving up the belief that the others are always against them. If we consider others to be fifth-columnists, then they too will see us in the same way (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 246). On the contrary, it is very important that both “the partners have one mind and are believ-

ers in ahimsa” (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 121). Then the efforts at reconciliation “are bound to succeed” (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 121). Their expression of mutual acceptance should not be merely a mask to make Gandhi happy (Gandhi 1959: 38).

We have communal disturbance when two communities begin to use violence against each other. Hence, Gandhi appeals to people who care for him to refuse “to give way to the instincts of revenge and retaliation even if the whole of Calcutta goes mad” (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 142). In any case “retaliation is no remedy. It makes the original disease much worse” (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 167). The attitude of not seeking revenge is an expression of our deeper selves, since a “true human being is he who does a good turn for evil” (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 175). Not only must we not retaliate, but we need to avoid anything that may provoke the other. Hence, the Hindus much avoid playing loud music near the mosques (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 59). The Muslims on their part should realize “the importance of the slogan ‘Jai Hind’” (Gandhi 1959: 59).

Two social agencies have a very important role in bringing about peace to a disturbed society. The Press needs “to be extra-wise and reticent. Unscrupulousness will act as a lighted match. I hope every editor and reporter will realize his duty to the full” (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 131). Gandhi himself is eager “to utilize it [the Press] in the work of Hindu-Muslim unity” (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 67). The Police have a very important function in times of communal violence. “They should make no distinction between a Hindu and a Musalman” (Gandhi 1959: 56). The events in Gujarat in the recent past bring home to us very powerfully the significance of what Gandhi is saying.

Gandhi also believed that women need to be motivated to work for communal harmony. His own experience has showed him how effective they can be. Hence, when addressing a meeting of women, he makes this fervent plea:

All the women who have come here should call on Muslim women. Women can do much work. My grand-daughter was with me in my Noakhali tour. I used to send her to Muslim women daily. It was amazing the way they talked with her. These women used to test her also. Women should work for eradicating untouchability (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 70).

After he had started his fast on 1st September 1947, Gandhi was asked by his friends whether he was right in doing this. They tried to convince him that the riots are the work of some goondas. To this Gandhi replies:

The conflagration has been caused not by the goondas but by those who have become goondas. It is we who make goondas. Without our sympathy and passive support, the goondas would have no legs to stand on. I want to touch the hearts of those who are behind the goondas (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 132).

He makes similar statements on other occasions too (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 149, 151; Gandhi 1959: 93). Gandhi presents to us his analysis of the situation: 1. People are basically good, but due to some reason they become goondas and take to violence. 2. Often they are instruments used by others who want violence and yet want to be considered good persons. They are “the gentlemen goondas who are the real creators of trouble” (Gandhi 1959: 94). 3. Even when some people inflict violence, the silence of the others amounts to approval. The truth of what Gandhi said over fifty years ago is amply borne out by the violence that followed the Godhra carnage compared with the peaceful situation that prevailed after the terrorist attack on the Akshardham temple in Gandhinagar. The seniors of the gentlemen goondas realized that “a repeat of the post-Godhra violence would be disastrous” for the party in power (Malik, Mahurkar & Unnithan 2002: 32 – 39; here p. 35b).

Shaping the Future

What is it that motivates Gandhi to undertake the difficult task of reconciling Hindus and Muslims in Calcutta? He thinks that because it is the “premier city of India” (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 22), “Calcutta is the key to the peace of the whole of Hindustan” (Gandhi 1959: 96). Hence, he claims: “I know I shall be able to tackle the Punjab too if I can control Calcutta” (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 133). If in Calcutta the “Hindus and Muslims, rich and poor, could work together, it was bound to have effect in East and West Punjab and the work that they would do here would be the work for the whole country” (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 123). His faith was confirmed by subsequent events: “the Calcutta happenings had a salutary effect on Bihar” (Gandhi 1959: 46). Just as Calcutta is significant for the whole of India,

so too India is significant for the whole of Asia. "If India fails, Asia dies" (CWMG, vol. 89: 221). Gandhi even believed that if we, people of different religions, "live and die for India together... the whole world will follow our footsteps" (Gandhi 1959: 57). Hence, "whatever other people may do, let us keep our hearts clean. We must remember that if we do not do this, we shall become monsters. We have to keep our India pure and clean and we must be tolerant" (CWMG, vol. 89: 243).

Gandhi reminds the people of our land of the important role India played in the past history. "It has been aptly called the nursery of many blended cultures and civilizations. Let India be and remain the hope of all the exploited races of the earth, whether in Asia, Africa or in any part of the world" (CWMG, vol. 89: 221). When an eighteen-year old youth told him that history proves that Hindus and Muslims cannot live in harmony, Gandhi replied: "I have seen more of history than anyone of you, and I tell you that I have known Hindu boys who called Muslims 'uncle'. Hindus and Muslims used to participate in each other's festivals and other auspicious occasions" (CWMG, vol. 89: 34). But now violent events have tarnished the image of our country. "The glorious land that was India has become a cremation-ground today. It has become that barbarous" (CWMG, vol. 89: 243). Gandhi tells his audience about the adverse remarks about India made by Winston Churchill on 27th September, 1947, that as a result of the communal violence India would will experience "a retrogression of civilization" (CWMG, vol. 89: 253). Gandhi pleads with his audience: "You still have sufficient time to reform your ways and prove Mr. Churchill's prediction wrong" (CWMG, vol. 89: 255). If our nation is to prosper, then "Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and Parsis should live as one" (CWMG, vol. 89: 238).⁴ If India is to prosper we need to feel secure. "How can we govern our country if we live in fear?" (CWMG, vol. 89: 239). This feeling of security must come from the goodwill we have and not from the arms we possess "Arms can never protect anyone" (CWMG, vol. 89: 240). Mutual trust is an essential dimension of real freedom. "If communal strife spreads over the whole of India, of what use is our freedom?" (Gandhi 1959: 30).

Gandhi's deep desire was "that the State should undoubtedly be secular" (CWMG, vol. 89: 51). He rejected "the theory that Hin-

dus and Muslims are two separate nations” (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 12). Hence, religious affiliation should not be an obstacle to our realizing a secular state. “A nation does not belong to any particular religion or sect. It should be absolutely independent of either religion or sect. Every person should be free to follow the religion of his choice” (Gandhi 1959: 37). Those who rule our nation should be above partisan loyalties. Addressing the people during a prayer meeting, Gandhi said:

The police must execute their duties properly. They should make no distinction between a Hindu and a Muslim. I have received complaints from the Hindus that Muslim officers do not pay any attention to them, and from Muslims that Hindu officers neglect them. This should not happen (Gandhi 1959: 56).

People of all religious loyalties should be able to live in peace and harmony. Hence, Gandhi wishes that “those who have left their houses [due to fear] must return to them” (Gandhi 1959: 56). Gandhi was also totally against “the exchange of populations” between the two newly formed countries (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 237). If when searching for employment people are guided by communal loyalties, then “they will never be able to rise, nor will they be able to improve their employer” (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 58). In like manner “there should be no distinction made on a communal basis in payment of wages” (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 58).

There is a deeper reason why people of different faiths need to live in peace and harmony. This is the fruit of authentic religiosity. Gandhi reminds us that the God who dwells in us and the others “is the same” (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 242). This is the reason why “Every faith is on its trial in India” (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 5). Therefore, “if the Hindu majority treasured their religion and duty, they would be just at all cost” (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 61). “Those who are indulging in brutalities are bringing disgrace upon themselves and the religion they represent” (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 32). “No religion can be built up in this manner” (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 201). More than our religion, it is the humanity we all share that beckons us to be instruments of peace. Gandhi reminds us of this: “But let us learn at least this much, that our religion does not teach us hatred. This is why I would like to call upon you to be human. If we become human, we raise the stock of India. Today we are bringing the country down” (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 264).

Accepting Gandhi's Challenge

After his assassination, all over the world people gave expression to their esteem for Gandhi. Albert Einstein said:

Gandhi has demonstrated that a powerful human following can be assembled not only through the cunning game of the usual political manoeuvres and trickeries but also through the cogent examples of a morally superior conduct of life. In our times of utter moral decadence he was the only statesman to stand for a higher human relationship in the political sphere (Fischer 1982: 587).

As a votary of satyagraha, Gandhi believed that the only way we can help people to change for the better was to appeal to the human depth hidden in each one of us. As Stafford Cripps, an important member of the Labour Party of Britain wrote: "I know no other man of any time or indeed in recent history who has so forcefully and convincingly demonstrated the power of spirit over material things" (Fischer 1982: 22). A person has soul-force to the extent his life embodies the ideal he projects. "Those who seek justice must do justice, must have clean hands" (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 189). Efforts at reconciliation will bear no fruit "if the basic honesty of intention on the part of the leaders and the rank-and-file workers is not there" (*CWMG*, vol. 89: 138).

We are living at a time when "fresh violence is inflicted upon individuals and entire peoples, and the culture of death takes hold in the unjustifiable recourse to violence to resolve tensions" (John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia* n. 38; Eng. Trans, Bombay: 2000: 108). In this situation "the Church is called to be deeply involved in international and interreligious efforts to bring about peace, justice and reconciliation" (John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia* n. 38; Eng. Trans, Bombay: 2000: 108). This is all the more true of the Church in India. She is called to be a sacrament of reconciliation, especially today, when we see so much violence in the name of religion in our land. We are now faced with a question: What is it that we Christians can learn from Gandhi? Like all of us he too had his weaknesses. When the train he was traveling in on his way to Calcutta stopped in a village in Bihar, he found a big crowd waiting to receive his darshan. Many rushed to the window near which Gandhi was standing. As a result there was a stampede. Gandhi "slapped one of them... [but] although Bapu's slap-

ping was due to his uncontrolled anger, the one who received it took it as a blessing from the Mahatma and another person rushed forward to receive a slap on his cheek” (Gandhi 1959: 18). Since the people were convinced of the basic commitment and honesty of Gandhi, they overlooked his shortcomings. Addressing the Royal Empire Society on October 6, 1948 Louis Mountbatten said that Gandhi “was not compared with some great statesman like Roosevelt or Churchill [by Indians]. They classified him simply in their minds with Mohammed and with Christ” (Fischer 1982: 587).

Gandhi saw himself as an instrument in God’s hands. “We are mere creatures in God’s hand. Only if God helps us can we protect our honour” (CWMG, vol. 89: 242). He shares his conviction with us: “I do not have any magic wand with me. Nor do I possess a sword. I have only one thing with me, and this is to recite the name of God and work in the name of God” (CWMG, vol. 89: 247). Therefore, prayer is a basic element in the process of reconciliation, it being “the very core of the life of man” (Gandhi 1961: vol. 1, 174). Gandhi advises his friends: “Plead with Him, not with man. Plead with Him who brings redemption to the fallen. He is right in our midst. When He is there to protect us, why should we be angry with anyone or be afraid?” (Gandhi 1961: vol. 1, 174). If we honestly do what we can and prayer is part of this struggle then we have good reason to be confident because “God is always on the side of truth” (Gandhi 1961: vol. 1, 234). When people tried to dissuade him from undertaking a fast to resolve the conflict in Calcutta, he answered: “If God wants to make use of me, He will enter the people’s hearts and calm them down and preserve my body. I have started the fast only in His name” (Gandhi 1961: vol. 1, 134 & 159).

Gandhi tells us that the *Bhagavad-gita* was for him “an infallible guide of conduct... [his] dictionary of daily reference” (Gandhi 1927-29: 221). He thinks that his approach “represents the true meaning of the Gita” (Gandhi 1961: 256). Inspired by this text, he worked with “single-minded devotion and indifference to all other interests” (Gandhi 1961: vol. 2: 11). This explains why as a mediator Gandhi was acceptable both to the Hindus and the Muslims (CWMG, vol. 89: 21-22; Gandhi 1959: 18). If in his peace-efforts he was able to coopt leaders belonging to both the communities, it was precisely

because he was not perceived as a political rival by either of them. Gandhi was first and last a person totally dedicated to peace. In his struggle he was not trying to create a vote bank, but to touch the minds and hearts of people. The *Bhagavad-gita* shows Gandhi “how the principle of conquering hate by love, untruth by truth, can and must be applied” (Gandhi 1961: vol. 2: 310).

As I noted some years ago (Anand 1995: 561-80), many Christians have been very generous in their appreciation of Gandhi. He reminds us of Jesus, the humble servant of all. The Church in India will be able to effectively mediate reconciliation only when she is seen as a community of this kenotic Jesus, relying not so much on institutional power, prestige, status or on money, but imitating Jesus who is among us as one who serves. This will be possible if like Gandhi we become a community of people who are deeply prayerful. This is also emphasised by Pope John Paul II:

In Asia, home of great religions, where individuals and entire peoples are thirsting for the divine, the Church is called to be a praying Church, deeply spiritual even as she engages in immediate human and social concerns. All Christians need a true missionary spirituality of prayer and contemplation (*Ecclesia in Asia*, no.23, 69).

Endnotes

1. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* is the title Gandhi gives to his autobiography.
2. That Mountbatten shared the same sentiment is indicated by the fact that even before a proper inquiry was made, he said that it was a Hindu who shot Gandhi dead. When he was asked by his press attaché how he knew this, he replied: “I don’t, but if it really was a Muslim, India is going to live one of the most ghastly massacres the world has even seen.” See Larry Collins & Dominique Lapierre, *Freedom at Midnight*, London: Collins, 1975, pp. 440-41.
3. For the actual involvement of Suhrawardy in the violence on 16 August, 1946, see R.C. Majumdar (ed.), *Struggle for Freedom (The History and Culture of the Indian People, XI)*, Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1969, pp. 746-50.
4. This talk was with refugees from Pakistan, and hence Muslims were not present among them. This may explain why Gandhi did not include them.

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The Sacrament of Reconciliation Its Socio-Political Implications

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Abstract: After analysing the dynamics of reconciliation, the author traces the social and communitarian dimensions of the sacrament of reconciliation. Urging us to support initiatives taken in the direction social-political harmony, the author affirms that the communal strife will not prevail!

Keywords: Sacrament of reconciliation, society, community, forgiveness, justice.

During New Testament times, Jesus' message of salvation was stated in the words: "repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1/15). This called for a change of heart, mind and action and was understood as conversion. In time, the defining moment of conversion was identified with the celebration of baptismal initiation symbolizing the forgiveness of sins and insertion into a community of believers in Jesus Christ. The Church was seen to be this community of believers who came together to celebrate the Eucharist and to pray, as we find in 1 Corinthians 11/18 and 14/19. The church community gave its members a continuing sense of Christian identity by the celebration of sacraments in and for the community. Every sacramental celebration—more particularly the sacrament of reconciliation that is in evidence from the second century—reiterated Jesus' message of salvation that called for a continuing process of conversion. Each sacramental celebration highlighted the moment of baptismal initiation once again so that a person could reaffirm his/her deepening relationship to God in and through the Church. At the same time, it expressed the unity that the Christian community experienced in living out the values proclaimed by Jesus in his 'words and deeds, signs and wonders' (DV 4).