

What Jesus Means to Me

MOHANDAS KARAMCHAND GANDHI

What does a devout Hindu have to say about Jesus? Gandhi read the Bible while studying law in London and was profoundly moved by the Sermon on the Mount. Later in South Africa a fellow lawyer took him to a revival meeting where the commitment to prayer compelled him. Gandhi recalled from this period, "I have remained forever indebted to them for the religious quest they awakened in me. I shall always cherish the memory of their contact. The years that followed had more, not less, of such sweet and sacred contacts in store for me." Here we read his distilled thoughts on Jesus.

Although I have devoted a large part of my life to the study of religion and to discussion with religious leaders of all faiths, I know very well that I cannot but seem presumptuous in writing about Jesus Christ and trying to explain what he means to me. I do so only because my Christian friends have told me on more than a few occasions that, for the very reason that I am not a Christian and that (I shall quote their words exactly) "I do not accept Christ in the bottom of my heart as the only Son of God," it is impossible for me to understand the profound significance of his teachings, or to know and interpret the greatest source of spiritual strength that man has ever known.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) is remembered as the man who led a non-violent revolution, first in South Africa and later in India. He was assassinated at the age of seventy-eight.

Reprinted from What Jesus Means to Me, Navajivan Publishing House, 1959, 9-11.

Although this may or may not be true in my case, I have reasons to believe that it is an erroneous point of view. I believe that such an estimate is incompatible with the message that Jesus Christ gave to the world. For he was, certainly, the highest example of One who wished to give everything, asking nothing in return, and not caring what creed might happen to be professed by the recipient. I am sure that if he were living here now among men, he would bless the lives of many who perhaps have never even heard his name, if only their lives embodied the virtues of which he was a living example on earth; the virtues of loving one's neighbor as oneself and of doing good and charitable works among one's fellow men.

What, then, does Jesus mean to me? To me, he was one of the greatest teachers humanity has ever had. To his believers, he was God's only begotten son. Could the fact that I do or do not accept this belief make Jesus have any more or less influence in my life? Is all the grandeur of his teaching and of his doctrine to be forbidden to me? I cannot believe so. To me it implies a spiritual birth. My interpretation, in other words, is that in Jesus' own life is the key of his nearness to God; that he expressed, as no other could, the spirit and will of God. It is in this sense that I see him and recognize him as the son of God. But I do believe that something of this spirit that Jesus exemplified in the highest measure, in its most profound human sense, does exist. I must believe this; if I did not believe it I should be a skeptic; and to be a skeptic is to live a life that is empty and lacks moral content. Or, what is the same thing, to condone the entire human race to a negative end.

It is true that there certainly is reason for skepticism when one observes the bloody butchery that European aggressors have unleashed, and when one thinks about the misery and suffering prevalent in every corner of the world, as well as the pestilence and famine that always follow, terribly and inevitably, upon war. In the face of this, how can one speak seriously of the divine spirit incarnate in man? Because these acts of terror and murder offend the conscience of man; because man

knows that they represent evil: because, in the inner depths of his heart and of his mind, he deplores them. And because, moreover, when he does not go astray, misled by false teachings or corrupted by false leaders, man has within his breast an impulse for good and a compassion that is the spark of divinity, and which some day, I believe, will burst forth into the full flower that is the hope of all mankind. An example of this flowering may be found in the figure and in the life of Jesus. I refuse to believe that there now exists or has ever existed a person that has not made use of Jesus' example to lessen his sins, even though he may have done so without realizing it. The lives of all have, in some greater or lesser degree, been changed by his presence, his actions, and the words spoken by his divine voice.

I believe that it is impossible to estimate the merits of the various religions of the world, and moreover I believe that it is unnecessary and harmful even to attempt it. But each one of them, in my judgment, embodies a common motivating force: the desire to uplift man's life and give it purpose. 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. □

Illuminations

And Mary said, "Here Am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me, according to your word."

Luke 1:38

Pray, pray, pray with all your strength. In prayer is the solution for every situation.

Our Lady, Fatima, 1917

Although others before her strove for love, / Men could best understand it through her. / She observed the law and family traditions, / But paid no heed to rewards, threats, praise, or laments. So she left all for the sake of her unique Beloved. / Justly then did Love exalt her, / When Love made her the Mother of Love.

Hadewijch of Antwerp

In every mosque in the world, the Mihrab, or prayer niche in the eastern wall of the mosque, is dedicated to the Virgin Mary. It is a shame that more Christians do not know this. Mary is the perfect woman, complete in herself, being the perfect matrix, the perfect receptacle from which Jesus could be born.

Shaikh Hamid

Mary said, "How shall a son be born to me, when no man has touched me?" He said: "Allah creates what he pleases; when he has decreed something, He only says to it BE, and it is."

Koran Surah 4

Erk Hanut, co-author with Andrew Harvey of a new, beautifully illustrated book, Mary's Vineyard, Daily Meditation, Readings, and Revelations, dedicates his introduction to Mary Ford-Grabowsky, former editor of Fellowship in Prayer. Selections are reprinted by permission of Quest Books, P.O. Box 270, Wheaton, IL 60189-0270. Mary is now the vice president of the Institute for Creation Spirituality in Oakland, California.