WITH HEAD AND HEART

The Autobiography of HOWARD THURMAN

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Crossing the Great Divide—India
In 1935 the national YMCA and YWCA International Committee, acting on behalf of the World Student Christian Federation, invited me to be the chairman of a delegation of Afro-Americans on a pilgrimage of friendship as guests of the Student Christian Movement of India, Burma, and Ceylon. The delegation would consist of four members: Reverend and Mrs. Edward G. Carroll, my wife, and myself.

The idea of such a delegation was at that time audacious; nothing like it had been undertaken before. India, Burma, and Ceylon were still colonies of the British Empire. Gandhi had been imprisoned several times and was in a life-and-death struggle for freedom against an established imperialism. The vast Indian masses were being stirred by the invasion of a hope that steadily contradicted the grimness of their present reality. Gandhi was a symbol of that hope.

The presumptuousness of our pilgrimage was made clear when the International Committee sought visas for the delegation to enter and to travel in those colonies for a period of four months. Such an application could not be handled as a routine matter by a consulate but had to be referred to the Home Office in London. At the time it was reported to me by a member of the committee that the representative of the British government in New York had remarked, "You do not know what you are asking. If an American-educated Negro just traveled through the country as a tourist, his presence would create many difficulties for our rule—now you are asking us to let four of them travel all over the country and make speeches!" Yet the way was cleared for us to go.

My central concern was whether I could in good conscience go to India, or any other missionary field, as a representative of the
Christian religion as it was projected from the West, and primarily from America. I did not want to go to India as an apologist for a segregated American Christianity, yet how could I go under the auspices of the Student Christian Movement without seeming in fact to contradict my intention?

Suppose I refused and stated my basis for so doing, would this abort what initially had been a good idea, a tremendous contribution to creative human relations transcending boundaries—national, international, racial, cultural, and religious? How clear a case could I make for the religious grounds of my objections? If I could not represent American Christianity in foreign countries, how could I continue to be part of it in my own country?

Sue and I spent many hours discussing all the issues. A great gift in my life has been the companion who meets me at the gate in any arena where I am called upon to do battle and who with great compassion finds the weak points in my idea or contention without in any way diminishing me. For an entire weekend the struggle was on. Finally, we came to a place of calm and decision—I must refuse the invitation. This I did in a letter in which I made it clear that I did not think I could go to India and speak my own mind, interpreting Christianity as I felt it and thought it. I was sure that I would be bound by assumption to interpret Christianity from within the framework of American Christianity, which, from my point of view, lacked much that was fundamental to the genius of the faith itself.

Instead of replying to my letter, the New York committee sent Winifred Wygall, a good friend of ours, who was a national YWCA secretary, to Washington to talk the whole matter through to see if there could not be a meeting of minds. She was empowered to speak for the committee, and whatever understanding was reached among the three of us would be binding on the committee. We talked far into the night.

Among us emerged the kind of communication that is possible only in a climate of honesty and trust. It was clear to her what our objections were, but she argued that these did not make a real handicap. On the contrary, as a member of the committee she was sure that it was precisely because of the objections I had expressed that the committee had chosen me as chairman and included Sue in the delegation. We were now of one mind that the trip was right for us at this time, and so advised the committee.

We did not know intimately the young couple making up the other half of the delegation. I knew Edward G. Carroll from previous meetings, but at the time of their selection I had not met his wife. How fortunate we all were to have come together in such a crucial and exacting undertaking! They were just married and several years younger than we were. He was well trained for his vocation, a graduate of Morgan State College in Baltimore and of the Yale Divinity School. As the son of a Methodist clergyman, he was closely acquainted with some of the amoral aspects of highly structured Christian organization. He had come through this organization carefully nurtured by his father, a dedicated Christian minister, and a wise, sensitive mother. He grew up seeing the institution without blinkers and of his own choosing became a clergyman in the church of his father. With all of this he was blessed with a spontaneous gaiety that prevented him from taking himself too seriously. His wife was a college graduate, equally committed in faith, personable, quick-minded, and blessed with a joyous laugh that carried its own contagion. As couples, we soon enjoyed being together as though we had known each other many years.

During the fall before the India journey, Miriam Slade visited New York City for a period of five days. She was the Englishwoman who had given up her life in England in order to become not merely a follower of Gandhi but also to live in his ashram as a member of the family community of which he was the center. As soon as I learned of her visit, I knew that it was most important that two things happen while she was in this country. In the first place, it seemed urgent that we should have a chance to meet and talk. From her I was sure that it would be possible to get a feel of the life, the mood, and the people of India that reflected much of the quality of Gandhi himself. Her situation was unique because she was a woman of the upper class and had given up her way of life, abandoning many of the goals of her peers, including wealth and status. I was curious to understand how she had been energized to take such a step. For me, it was inevitable that I would see the Mahatma through her eyes and be affected by the feeling
tone which emanated from her concerning the people of the country and their aspirations. In the second place, it was important that she should have exposure, in a primary way, to American Negroes, in order that her reaction be shared with the Mahatma. This would be a prelude to our journey and, however limited, it would be equivalent to firsthand information for Gandhi himself.

After many telephone calls I was able to speak to her directly. I extended to her a personal invitation from the university to be our overnight guest and to address a special assembly of faculty and students. I told her that as Howard was the only Negro university of its kind in the United States, her experience there could not be duplicated anywhere else in the world. It was my sure feeling that the Mahatma would expect her to do this once she had such a unique opportunity. Of course, because of his experience in South Africa, Gandhi was acquainted with African people, but he had no opportunity to know Afro-Americans firsthand. My final argument was that my wife and another couple were going to India in the fall to make a pilgrimage of friendship to the students of India, Burma, and Ceylon. She was convinced, rearranged her schedule, secured the cooperation of her manager, and four days later came to visit Howard University.

The problem of getting an audience to attend a public lecture in the middle of the week (or any other time) was formidable. Besides, there was little general knowledge of the vast subcontinent of India. Here and there were a few people who knew Indian students or lecturers who had come to this country, but that was all. On the other hand, there was keen interest in the struggle for freedom from colonialism between Gandhi and the British government. There was a stirring in the wind that we recognized. Finally, President Mordecai Johnson, again and again, in public addresses, paid authentic tribute to the journey into freedom charted by this "little brown man."

Miriam came. It was a part of her agreement through her manager that she be booked into the Willard Hotel, the capital's most prestigious guest house. When I met her in the lobby, I was overwhelmed by her appearance. She was tall and elegant in bearing. Her sari was made of khadi cloth; she wore a greatcoat against the winter winds, over her shoulders a rather elongated cloth bag.

on her bare feet a pair of simple sandals which, I discovered later, were made from the skin of an animal that had died a natural death. She greeted me, looking directly into my eyes, then smiled as she said, taking in her surroundings in one sweeping glance, "Miriam, what are you doing in a place like this?"

The subject of her address to the assembly was in itself a bold, almost arrogant, challenge, but not quite so: "He who has more than he needs for efficient work is a thief." The essential point was quite clear and convincing. There is no moral justification for having food and a surfeit of creature comforts at one's disposal while numberless people all over the world in every country are without the necessities to survive. Hers was a quiet, undramatic delivery, but the intensity of her passion gathered us all into a single embrace, and for one timeless interval we were bound together with all the people of the earth.

For days afterward, half in jest but with an undertone of seriousness, one student would say to another, "You are a thief, look at your clothes!" Or "Are you a thief? You must be, with all that food on your plate!" Ultimately, the effect of her address could not be measured, but its impact that night was sure.

The next day she came out to visit the university before returning to her hotel. She was profoundly affected by the dogs in the kennel at the Medical School. I can see her now even more clearly than I can hear her words: "Of course, these dogs are kept for experimental purposes in the course of which they will be killed." Then she entered into a discussion about the total meaning of reverence for life and the relevance of the doctrine of ahimsa.

When I spoke of our plans to visit India in the fall, she said, "You must see Gandhiji while you are there. He will want to visit with you and will invite you to be the guests of the ashram. I'll talk with him about it upon my return and you will hear from him." Sure enough, when we arrived at Colombo there was a postcard from him inviting the delegation to be his guests at the ashram.

It was in the late spring of the same year that Muriel Lester was touring the West Coast during one of her periodic lecture tours in the United States. She was well known among pacifists and religious leaders all over the world. Many of her years were spent, as
a young woman, working in the slums of London. From this experience she emerged with a sense of world mission to fulfill the true destiny of the children of men, now thwarted by poverty, violence, and exploitation. She had been our guest at the university, and I knew of her established friendship with Gandhi and the Indian movement.

When she discovered through a mutual friend in Los Angeles the purpose of our mission to India, she urged him to invite me to meet her in Berkeley the following weekend so that we would have a full day to talk. She said that a friend had made it possible for her to defray all expenses for my trip. I arrived in Berkeley by train on a Sunday morning. We spent most of the day walking and talking in the Berkeley hills before returning to the railway station in time for me to get the train back to Chicago the same day.

The burden of her conversation had to do with sharing her knowledge and feelings about Gandhi, the Indian situation, and her embarrassment that her country, England, was the great offender. Above all else, she wanted to tell me about the students and the general mood of the Indian people as she knew them. It was important for me to correct her information concerning our situation in America and to reveal to her our mood and attitude toward both American Christianity and Western Christianity in general. The exchange was most profitable. Her greatest contribution to my thought was the insight she shared into the Anglo-Indian mentality.

How arduous it was to take a leave from Howard University for an entire year! I had been on the faculty only three years. As chairman of the university’s Committee on Religious Life, I was responsible not only for the Sunday services in the chapel but also for the total unstructured religious witness in the university community. My teaching in the School of Religion was opening up a whole new range of exploration for my mind. We had just begun to find our way in the confusion, paradoxes, and secularism of the only recognized Negro university in the country.

President Johnson recommended my leave of absence from September 1935 until September 1936, without salary. This was an overwhelming hardship because I was still paying off an indebtedness of several thousand dollars incurred during the three traumatic years of Kate’s illness.

By securing a loan on my life insurance I was able to make the necessary financial arrangements. As far as the university was concerned, it only remained for me to arrange for someone to take my place as acting chairman of the committee and to preside at the university chapel services. I was happy in the choice of Oscar Lee, to whom we gave the use of our furnished residence, which made the transition easier.

We could not take our two small daughters with us to India. But we were able to get my sister Madaline to accompany all of us as far as Geneva, Switzerland, where, in addition to acting as surrogate parent to our daughters, she could continue her study of the Dalcroze School of Music’s method of teaching. The five of us set sail for Europe in September on the Ile de France.

It was the second crossing of the Atlantic for Sue and me, but the fall of the year was new to us; the mood of the sea is restless, and wary of all objects of whatever size that are not denizens of its waters. There were days and nights when the sea was in pure rage. The ship was sealed against the wind and the waves as it was flung recklessly up and down and from side to side—passively—as if at last we would be swallowed up or be demolished. I loved it all. The very roots of my being were exposed by the raw energy of the sea, as it tried to dislodge the huge steel intrusion into its vital parts. Not once did I sicken, not once did I miss a meal, although during the critical periods I was practically alone in the huge dining room. It was necessary to quiet the fears of our girls, particularly Olive, who was well aware of what was happening and had to be constantly reassured. Anne needed attention, because she had been given her last series of inoculations after we set sail from New York. She had to face two demons simultaneously—the pain of the needles and the heaving and plunging of the ship. Fortunately, because of her age, her fears and discomforts could be diffused with the amusements we devised. I shall always remember the quivering muted whimper of terror that came from the children’s lips when the huge vessel shuddered, and everything around us, including the floor and the bunks, seemed to go into an uncontrollable spasm.
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But when the sun shone and the sea was calm it was pure bliss to experience as a family those moments when the seemingly endless water reached to a circled horizon and made us feel that we and the whole sweep of the world were undifferentiated in a moment of time. Such moments on deck in the good clean brisk air cleansed our nostrils of the subtle stench of the toilets that made one think of rivers of urine. By journey's end it seemed that the odor was tangible, despite constant and persistent scrubbings and fumigation.

Sue was occupied during most of the crossing with creating and putting together by hand a little green velvet dress for Anne's birthday, which, with Olive's, would be celebrated in Geneva on the evening we were scheduled to leave Geneva for Marseilles. Fortunately, several years before I had spent part of a summer in Geneva and lived at a Quaker hostel. Mrs. Redpath, the director, and I became quite good friends and we had kept in touch with each other during the interval. She helped us find a good place for Madaline and the girls to live, thus easing a critical problem for us in leaving them behind in a strange city.

On arriving at the railway station in Geneva, I carried the baby in my arms as I made arrangements for our trunks to be brought out. Suddenly I realized that she was becoming more and more excited, but I could not understand the reason because she was looking over my shoulder in the opposite direction. When I turned around I noticed some twenty-five or thirty people following us in animated conversation and excitement because of the communication they were having with this strange, beautiful, happy brown baby. It was her introduction to Geneva, Switzerland—and variations of that experience took place during the entire stay in that unique European city.

Olive joined the children of many nations attending the International School for Children in Geneva. She had been Sue's companion in Mexico the previous spring, so this was her second international adventure. Madaline had arranged for her own studies at the Dalcroze School of Music before we left the United States. We took a night train to Marseilles after celebrating the birthdays of our girls, both born in October. We had a small family party, watched the candles burn down, and then quickly, silently, took our leave for an unknown country on an uncharted pilgrimage. For long hours Sue and I sat in the carriage watching the darkness, here and there a few stars, lights from houses and towns through which we passed—each of us with his own thoughts and questions. There was no time for words—all the words had been said and the heart could only commune with itself, the pure language of silence. At last we shared assurances with each other and were comforted. Our children were closer to India, being in Switzerland, than would have been the case had they remained in America. And they were with the one person besides ourselves who, on all counts, meant more to them than anyone else in the world. Our travail was quieted.

We joined the Carrolls in Marseilles, to begin the long sea voyage. There would be some days to wait in this most fascinating of French ports before taking ship to Colombo, the capital and port city of Ceylon. We could well use this period of time together in defining the meaning of the venture as a whole and the responsibility of each individual for the several assignments in the tentative schedule that we had in hand.

Sue had earlier been part of one of the first faculty-student Tours of Friendship to eight student centers in Europe under the auspices of the International Student Service. Further, as a national traveling secretary of the YMCA, she had worked with women and girls on college and university campuses and in wider communities throughout the United States, with occasional staff visits to Canada. Anticipating the India assignment, she had spent several months in Mexico, studying the history and culture of the people. It was decided that, as a social historian in the field of Afro-American life and history, she would speak at college assemblies and meet with women's groups that at that time were spreading a vital influence in the three countries to be covered on the tour.

Phenola Carroll had only recently graduated from college with a major in education and had begun teaching in Virginia. She was especially interested in those methods of teaching in the educational system of India based on British precedents. It was decided she would visit schools and speak particularly to young people's groups.
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Reverend Carroll would share much of the preaching with me, especially on Sunday morning, and would address the college and university chapel services so prominently featured in the program. That left me the heavy assignment of speaking almost nightly in all places visited, at what was called the public meeting, with all four members of the delegation present. These were to be important occasions, bringing together broad segments of the total community, including the several religious faiths of India, various denominations of the Christian church, government officials (British and Indian), civic organizations, and, of course, college and university faculty and students.

The trip across the Mediterranean, through the Suez Canal and into the Indian Ocean, provided long days in which there was time for the four of us to become a unit. By journey's end we were a family and the purpose of our journey was clearly felt and thought through.

We arrived in Colombo after twenty-one days of ocean travel. We were scheduled to spend ten days as the guests of the student movement of Ceylon, but there was some trepidation about our being able to land because we were not sure that the government would honor our credentials. Our ship passed the breakwater to the harbor; at last we were in smooth waters. The monsoons were exhausted; only the high spray of the tides remained as they dashed against the breakwater. The ship was surrounded by narrow skiffs carrying only one man apiece—they seemed like a spill of toothpicks that some giant had spread on the surface of the sea.

Our first encounter with the British government was the customs officer at the large table in the middle of the first-class saloon, who questioned us carefully. He told us to step aside until our hosts arrived to take us off the ship. Then abruptly he changed his mind and gave us landing permits. As the customs officer inspected our luggage, he said, “You come as bearers of peace; we do not suspect you.”

It was a totally new world to us. Suddenly I realized that the most subtle reaction was stirring in me. At first I did not know what was happening. There was the strangeness of the dress, the unfamiliar language, the faint aroma of spices mixed with a medley of smells that did not quite agree. Even when we were settled in our rooms and were acquainted with our schedules there was this inner stirring that could not be defined.

Suddenly what had been eluding my mind came to me. The dominant complexities all around us were shades of brown, from light to very dark; and more striking to me even than this were the many unmistakable signs that this was their country, their land. The Britshers, despite their authority, were outsiders. I had never had an experience like this. I did not know until that awareness came to me what a subtle difference this fact made in my reaction to my environment.

Aha! The first meal—how can I forget it? On board ship we were served an occasional curry dish as a foretaste. But now we were face to face with the hottest curry dishes to be found in the whole subcontinent. The curries were so hot and we so unaccustomed to the taste that it was not possible to get beyond the heat to savor the food itself. To top it all off, with our first meals we were served a glass of clear pepper water. That did it.

My first major engagement was at the Law College. The chairman of the Law Club wanted me to address the assembly on the aspects of civil disabilities under states’ rights. The subject was phrased technically as he presented it. I told him that I knew much about the subject experientially, but the group would have to transpose my observations into legal jargon.

At the end of my lecture there were two questions—one about an exhibit in the Scottsboro trial, and the other about the lack of black Americans in jury service. Both questions were posed by young men who had never traveled beyond the borders of Ceylon.

At the end of the lecture, the chairman invited me for coffee. When we were through, and the service was removed, he faced me directly and said, in effect:

“I had not planned to ask you this, but after listening to your lecture I am convinced that you are an intelligent man. What are you doing here? Your forebears were taken from the west coast of Africa as slaves, by Christians. They were sold in America, a Christian country, to Christians. They were held in slavery for some two hundred years by Christians. They were freed as a result of economic forces rather than Christian idealism, by a man who was not himself a professing Christian.
"Since that time you have been brutalized, lynched, burned, and denied most civil rights by Christians, and Christianity is unable to have any effect upon your terrible plight.

"I read a clipping from one of your papers giving an account of how one of your community was being hunted down by a mob on a Sunday night. When the men in a nearby church heard the news they dismissed the service and joined in the manhunt. When the poor man had been killed they went back to resume their worship of their Christian God.

"I think that an intelligent young Negro such as yourself, here in our country on behalf of a Christian enterprise, is a traitor to all of the darker peoples of the earth. How can you account for yourself being in this unfortunate and humiliating position?"

In reply, I told him that I was not there to bolster a declining or disgraced Christian faith, nor did I come to make converts to Christianity. "It is far from my purpose to symbolize anyone or anything. I think the religion of Jesus in its true genius offers me a promising way to work through the conflicts of a disordered world. I make a careful distinction between Christianity and the religion of Jesus. My judgment about slavery and racial prejudice relative to Christianity is far more devastating than yours could ever be. From my investigation and study, the religion of Jesus projected a creative solution to the pressing problem of survival for the minority of which He was a part in the Greco-Roman world. When Christianity became an imperial and world religion, it marched under banners other than that of the teacher and prophet of Galilee. Finally, the minority in my country that is concerned about and dedicated to experiencing that spirit that was in Jesus Christ is on the side of freedom, liberty, and justice for all people, black, white, red, yellow, saint, sinner, rich, or poor. They, too, are a fact to be reckoned with in my country."

Later, I had a most enlightening conversation with the warden of the Union Hostel for students. He was a Buddhist and was deeply troubled because of the influence of Christianity on Buddhist students. He opened the conversation by saying, "I look with alarm upon the number of Buddhist students who are attending Christian schools. Not because I fear that they will become Christians. You see, I think that there is very little difference between the two religions. My concern is far different.

"I notice that the students who attend Christian schools abandon their own faith, yet show no interest in becoming Christians.

"If the Christian schools made them into Christians, I would have no quarrel with them. Instead, they make it easy for them to become spiritual drifters."

In reply, I stated what had been moving in and out of my horizon like a fleeting ghost through all the years, an elusive insight. I said, "It seems to me that Christian education has succeeded if it makes a man an authentic Christian, or it may make him a better and more completely devout Buddhist. For I believe that Jesus reveals to a man the meaning of what he is in root and essence already. When the prodigal son came to himself, he came to his father."

It must be remembered that this was our first experience as official guests—prestigious ones at that—in a foreign country. In addition we were the guests of the Indians in their homeland, in which they were not quite free to "be at home" at home. Everything was strange, new, different, and yet in our basic concerns we were very close and in the tradition of our faith we shared a common heritage.

On the whole, the experience in Colombo was instructive, in part because it was disturbing and depressing. The outstanding impression was what seemed to me to be an irreverent disregard for the personality of the peoples of the country. Servants were everywhere, and everywhere degraded. I recall how my soul was invaded with shock and anger when, during the meal in a teacher's home, he was making a crucial point to me and was frustrated because he had to pay attention to boning the fish on his plate. In disgust he put down his fork and fish knife and yelled, "Boy—come here this fish!" Shades of the United States.

Another evening I recoiled as we sat at dinner to see that the overhead fan was attached to a pole, the pole to a pulley, and the pulley to a rope that disappeared on the porch, where a man was seated, the rope attached to his foot, which he moved back and forth to make a little breeze and keep the flies away.
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The paradoxes of our mission now began to emerge. Our coming had been heralded by no less a voice than the world-renowned Dr. E. Stanley Jones, author of several books, including Christ of the Indian Road. The expectation, apparently, was that as Afro-American Christians on a pilgrimage of friendship we were to be singing, soul-saving evangelists, full of the grace of God as that grace manifested itself in what it had done for us as black people in American society. Yet, we were seekers of knowledge and sought to deepen the knowledge of all the people, including the Americans, concerning Afro-Americans. We determined to steer clear of fitting into an evangelical mode as defined for us by other Christians. Our purpose was to give the Indian people free access to our feeling about ourselves and our idiom. We wanted to be true to the spirit and the teaching of Jesus as we understood it, while at the same time steering clear of the seemingly obvious need of Christianity to be bolstered up by members of the darker races.

The experience in Ceylon served as a comprehensive introduction to India and the customs of its people. It is entirely possible that at times, emotionally, I overreacted because there was much in the Europeans' attitude toward the Indians that I recognized as a part of my own American experience. Yet, precisely what adjustment could be made to accommodate the ethic of a religion like Christianity to the political and economic demands of imperialism? What is the anatomy of the process by which the powerful and the powerless can draw their support and inspiration from the worship of the same God and the teachings from the identical source? As we moved more and more deeply into the heart of India these issues would become ever more clearly etched, climaxing in a conversation with Gandhi three months later.

Part of the answer to the persistent dilemma was disclosed in a conversation with a high court judge. I was surprised to learn that a man with an English-educated and sophisticated legal mind such as his was also a member of an evangelical, conservative, and extremely emotional Christian sect that reminded me of the Holy Rollers of my boyhood. I discussed this with him one evening at dinner. He said in essence, "I do not participate in all of the emotionalism. The excitement of the Holy Ghost and the physical expressions of faith do not affect me. I belong because they are the most articulate Christian group in the way they live. They cast their lot with the people, living among them, sharing their daily lives as one with them—such is their testimony to their faith. European though they may be, they live the life of the simplest Indians who make up the traffic and the poverty of this city."

On our first Sunday evening in south India, I preached in the Anglican cathedral in Madras. It was at vespers. When the service was over and I was taking off my robe, a young Indian man came up to me, tears flowing down his cheeks in a quiet flood. "You did my Master wrong tonight—it was a terrible thing." I looked at him in amazement, but before I could speak he continued, "You preached your entire sermon and not one time did you call my Savior by name—by name—not one time."

"Let me ask you," I replied, "did my words seem to you to be true to His teaching? Did you sense His spirit in our midst?"

"Yes, but this is not the point. You did not call Him by name. And it is important that His name be lifted up that He might draw all men unto Him."

I was most sympathetic with this young man's dilemma. Slowly, I was beginning to understand what it is like to be a convert from one religion to another. It is far more complex than a shift from one creed to another within the same religious tradition, because it means all categories of the new faith must be clearly defined. This becomes much more complicated when that new faith seeks to take root in a culture essentially different from its origins, particularly when the new faith is in competition with a well-established religion like Hinduism. In this instance, Christianity was struggling with a religion as well as a culture and a civilization. Christianity, therefore, had to be presented as a religion, a culture, and a civilization, else it would have no impact here.

In such a struggle, precise definitions, literal statements of faith, unambiguous codes of behavior become mandatory; one can be matched against the other. When a convert is defending his new faith in the old climate, he must have fine tools. When a man becomes a Christian in a "Christian" country, what is required of him is that he renounce his former, personal life, not the life of his culture and his heritage. This becomes a personal commitment indicating the change of his private heart, but the change is not of
necessity a judgment of his heritage and his culture. But in a country such as India, where the Christian religion is not part of the heritage and culture, it is required of the convert to renounce not only his private past, but also the past of his cultural and social identity.

As a culture, a civilization, and a religion, for instance, Hinduism defines the lines along which inheritance takes place. It determines diet and daily etiquette, and in other concrete ways defines the individual. The convert has to renounce the old to take on the new. This is most simply done by confining one's associations (and other aspects of a total life) to people who are of the new faith.

Within Christianity itself such cultural distinctions may occur within certain religious commitments of faith. For a long time dietary proscriptions obtained within Catholicism; they are active today among Seventh-Day Adventists and others. In Orthodox Judaism, dietary and strict marriage proscriptions obtain. Wherever such proscriptions are in evidence, religion and culture conjoin to define the behavior of one's total life.

It is clear, then, why many of the Indian students and others could not understand why Christianity did not influence social customs and cultural attitudes of discrimination and racial prejudice in America. I admitted faithfully that their observation was valid as far as our personal experience was concerned; I did not know of any religious institution that had successfully projected itself into our society in an environment that was not under control, one in which no lines were drawn as to race and color. This pertained to churches of all religious groups in the United States.

These reflections were in my mind all the time I was working in India. I knew that I would have to admit what they were saying to be true, even as I kept on affirming my own deeply felt religious faith. Challenged as I was in the vastness of Indian life, all the thinking and the working out of this problem that I had done over the years on the word of Jesus to the disinherited now came to the fore. It served as a useful tool in my hands.

At this point in the journey we were distressed when Phenola Carroll was taken ill with scarlet fever. Her husband and Sue and I were put under quarantine. We were given a bungalow tent on the grounds of a hospital. I was taken out of quarantine to do my lectures morning and evening but was not permitted to have tea or dinner away from our quarters. When people came to talk with me, we would talk on the tennis court. I would sit at one end, and the visitors would sit at the other. We had to talk loudly enough to be heard but not close enough for contamination.

It was under such circumstances that I visited with Stanley Jones. His years as a missionary in India made a contribution whose effects will perhaps last as long as the American missionary tradition in India. But even he, as a white American Christian in India, over and over and over felt the necessity to transcend the social contradiction that the fact of his Christianity created. In the face of that paradox he preached the gospel and proclaimed the universal Christ.

In the course of our conversation he asked, "Have you read my new book, Christ the Alternative to Communism?"

"Yes, a friend of yours in South India gave it to me to read," I replied.

"Well, what do you think of it?"

I told him that he had made a very good case for communism but, in the very nature of the case, he had to make a weak case for Christianity. Whenever he referred to one of the basic teachings of Marxism he found that the same principle was more clearly stated in Christian teaching. But when he sought to document the teaching by living example, the best he could do was to quote from the Bible.

"This seemed to me to be the weakness of your thesis," I said.

Our discussion changed to the question of church union between the northern and the southern Methodist Church: a timetable for this had been agreed upon. My fear was that the price to be exacted for the union of these two great historic divisions of Methodism would be the freezing of the black Methodist churches into a single segregated jurisdiction. Of course, this is precisely what obtained for many years after their coming together under one banner of Methodism. At that time, however, Dr. Jones felt that if the issue were to be made central at the general conference there would be no union. He was sure that eventually the spirit of the
Master would overcome. Time voted for him—many years after. In 1971, Edward G. Carroll, our companion in India, became the bishop of New England of the United Methodist Church.

My mind and spirit churned in a fermentation of doubt and hope. I was convinced there was no more crucial problem for the believer than this—that a way be found by which his religious faith could keep him related to the ground of his security as a person. Thus, to be Christian, a man would not be required to stretch himself out of shape to conform to the demands of his religious faith; rather, his faith should make it possible for him to come to himself whole, in an inclusive and integrated manner, one that would not be possible without this spiritual orientation.

Years ago I had made a tentative discovery when I preached for the first time in the Methodist Church in my hometown and, to my amazement, discovered that I had the same kind of religious experience there that I had had in my own Baptist Church. Now, in India, there was a redefining of that experience, only in a much more complex and subtle way. I had to seek a means by which I could get to the essence of the religious experience of Hinduism as I sat or stood or walked in a Hindu temple where everything was foreign and new: the smells, the altars, the flowers, the chanting—all of it was completely outside my universe of discourse.

I had to find my way to the place where I could stand side by side with a Hindu, a Buddhist, a Moslem, and know that the authenticity of his experience was identical with the essence and authenticity of my own. There began to emerge a growing concept in my mind, which only in recent years I have been able to state categorically, namely, that the things that are true in any religious experience are to be found in that religious experience precisely because they are true; they are not true simply because they are found in that religious experience. It is not the context that determines validity. On any road, around any turning, a man may come upon the burning bush and hear a voice say, "Take off your shoes because the place where you are now standing is a holy place, even though you did not know it before." I think that is the heartbeat of religious authority. Little did I dream that the discovery that I began to make in the Methodist Church in Daytona, Florida, as a young Baptist preacher, would move in a straight line to the Temple of the Fish Eye in Madura.

This is not to say that all religions are one and the same, but it is to say that the essence of religious experience is unique, comprehensible, and not delimiting. Convention follows conviction; conviction is not validated by convention. As we moved through India, things began to sort themselves out, yet it was difficult to find the privacy to learn about the people or the economic, social, and political struggles. We were public figures. Always there were reporters and other representatives of the media seeking interviews and attending the public meetings. We were quoted in all the papers, and this in itself was a brand-new and threatening experience for our delegation. Naturally I found myself being extremely careful to choose terms because I knew that any statements of ours could easily be taken out of context.

In confidence, our friends advised us that our whole journey was under the watchful eyes of the British Criminal Investigation Department and that we should be aware of this at all times and make no public or private statements about the seething political situation. Nevertheless, I wanted information as to the real thought of the Indian people; how they looked at the British; how they looked at us, how they looked at the world, and, in their struggle, what they thought about their future. I felt that as long as I stuck to my interpretation of our own experience in America, referring to our struggle for civil rights and first-class citizenship, we would not offend the CID or the British powers in control. At the same time every Indian of any sensitivity could transpose what we were saying and apply it to his situation. Thus we would make some important contribution to them in their struggle and be permitted to journey through the several regions. But always we were fully and completely covered, as in an incident en route to Shantiniketan.

In Calcutta we took a train to Bhurpur to visit Rabindranath Tagore's university. There a man came up to say, "Where is your fourth member? Our information is that there are four of you in this party, but only three are getting off the train." Such was the constant surveillance! We suspected that our mail was opened and read. One night I was promised an opportunity to talk in free dis-
discussion with a group of Indian men from the various professions in the community. An Indian Anglican pastor had arranged it. He agreed to call a few people to meet in his study about ten o'clock in the evening. (He was embarrassed that the invitation could not include my wife, as by tradition no women were allowed.) That night we were sitting in his study talking informally before the serious discussion began. Suddenly he got up, walked out, and stood in the hallway so that he was visible to me but not to the others in the room. He beckoned, and I went out to him. He said, "I am sorry, I have failed you again. The man sitting to your left engaging you in conversation, even though he is an Indian, is CID. So, let us Indians say anything we want to say, we are at home, we know where we are. But you must not say anything critical of the government because, if you do, they will put you out at once."

The schedule was far more exacting than anyone had advised. It began shortly after daybreak with a quiet feminine voice announcing that it was time for Chota-tea and usually a hard roll. The humidity was so enervating that for me it took an act of will to get out of bed to prepare for the day. The hot tea was a miracle worker. On our first night in a small Indian town, a thoughtful friend had come by to welcome us and to give us advice. Do not eat any fresh, uncooked, or unpeeled fruit or vegetables, he said, and be careful of all drinking water. He also urged us to keep a flashlight under our pillows so that if we had to get out from under our mosquito netting and move around in our room we could first make a circle of light on the floor before putting our foot down, lest we disturb the nocturnal ramblings of some unsuspecting scorpion or cobra. The houses were all open, no window panes, with half-doors. For purposes of ventilation, the walls did not reach the bolsters supporting the roof. We slept in cots or beds without springs and on thin mattress pads for maximum circulation of air.

When our friend left, I sat for a long while in deep reflection. Sue urged me to come to bed, warning that the next day would be very full and exciting. I said, "Give me a few more minutes. I am conditioning my nervous system so that after tonight, until the end of the journey, it will be impossible for me inadvertently to step out of bed onto the floor without first making a circle of light to guide me."

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In my public lectures, the basic theme, "The Faith of the American Negro," created the most uneasiness in the American colony. I spoke in terms of a faith in my own mind, my faith in the destiny of my people, and always, a faith in God. It was in response to my public lectures in Lahore that I received the following letter from H. W. Luce, father of Henry Luce, who founded *Time* and *Life*. We were both wrestling with the dilemma created by the paradoxes in the American situation.

Lahore
February 12, 1936

Dear Mr. Thurman:

I listened with a great deal of interest to your address last night at YMCA (as also in the one given by your colleague, yesterday morning, at Arya-somaj College). I shared also in the pleasure of the delightful group as your wife sang to them at the lovely home of Mr. and Mrs. Rallia Ram.

I have also been a missionary in China for thirty years, am an ardent internationalist and inter-racialist. From boyhood up I (and some million others of whitebs in the United States also) have been interested in doing all I could to assist your group to attain the highest possible best.

That gives you my background and my family interest. Nevertheless, at the close of your address I had the feeling (shared by at least a few others) that, doubtless quite unintentionally, you had probably left a wrong impression on some of the thinking minds present.

The strong impression left upon me was that you felt the Negro race in America had suffered all it has suffered at the hand of the American whites—that they had not lifted a finger to help, and that your people, so far as they had gone, had attained all by their own inherent power. Not so much in what you said as in what you omitted was the impression given; and this could have been relieved by a very few sentences here and there.

Ever since I travelled as a Student Volunteer Secretary in 1895, covering southward the Mason and Dixon Line for the first time and going from Texas to Virginia I had some real interest and knowledge of your problems. I think of the millions of dollars and hundreds of lives which have been given in sacrificial service to your people and the many colleges and schools established.

I think of thousands of Negroes who have been helped to the highest education and opportunities; it might be that the very fact that you and
your colleagues were personally capable of going on a mission to India
(and having a journey which many of your supporters would gladly but
will never be able to take) has been partly due to the interest of some
of your white friends.

I think also of how few of those of your peoples who stayed in Africa
have arisen as high as the majority of your people who came to America.

That night before you were, no doubt, Muslims; and you could have
said, if it had been tactful, that it was largely Arab Muslims that brought
the slaves to the coast.

I think of Livingston and Stanley and many another man or woman
who gave their lives to stopping the slave trade at its source.

While no doubt the idea of “non-secession” was a dominant motive
for some in the war there were millions who fought and many died to
free the slaves. Lincoln was animated by his belief that “no nation can
exist half slave, half free.”

I realize that one cannot put everything one thinks and feels into one
address among several addresses. But it seemed to me there was many a
place in your address where a sentence or two, or even a parenthetical
phrase, might have led me to feel differently. As it was, I felt that your
message, far from aiding peace might (as I said, quite unconsciously on
your part) have the opposite effect. As I see it in the light of my under-
standing of your otherwise fine and able address, I would not be willing
to contribute in the interest of good will and peace toward making such
an address widely known in India or anywhere else.

I write in the kindest spirit and with all good will, solely to suggest
as an older man to a younger, that your work, so far as I can see, would
be more vital and creative if it touched upon the emphasis which I seem
to miss.

Very sincerely yours,
H. W. Luce

At dinner one night, at a large university center, there was a
discussion of colonialism and what it had brought by way of bless-
ings to the country. A very beautiful young Indian woman, an
instructor in a nearby college, whispered to me, “Dr. Thurman,
do you know why the sun never sets on the British Empire?” “No,”
I replied. “I will tell you,” she said. “God cannot trust the English-
man in the dark.”

Everywhere we went, we were asked, “Why are you here, if you
are not the tools of the Europeaus, the white people?” Of course,
there were many conspicuous exceptions to this, but the suspicion
of the Indians was not easily turned aside. The central question
was: Is Christianity powerless before the color bar? If it is power-
less, then what do you have to tell us that has any meaning? And,
of course, we were usually in the presence of our hosts, who were
generally Americans, or British teachers, ministers, and physicians.
I felt the heat in the question “If Christianity is not powerless, why
is it not changing life in your country and the rest of the world? If
it is powerless, why are you here representing it to us?” Hearing
this, our party went from campus to campus, city to city, town to
town, talking and lecturing and sharing. This question also pre-
vented a definite problem to the missionary, particularly the Amer-
ican missionary.

There was another complication that had direct bearing upon
how our delegation was received. As we encountered Americans, it
was our impression that they felt inferior to the British. This may
have been because they were foreigners in British territory. My
judgment is that it went deeper than that. It seems to me that
Americans tend to defer to the English—or did so until recently—
on the assumption that theirs is an old civilization and culture while
ours is young and therefore uncertain and brash. My private
thought is that our national uneasiness in the presence of the
English is rooted in a lingering collective guilt for rebelling against
the mother country. There is a deep need in the collective psyche of
a people for a point of referral, a refuge, where identification is
possible under a prescribed code of behavioral response. It is diffi-
cult for the voice of the people to be heard if it is not transmuted
into a single symbol. Whatever may be the explanation, Americans
tended to be defensive about our country and its culture.

There is still another element here. The English in India were
not in England, to be sure, but they were in the empire presided
over by the king-emperor and protected by the authority of the
British flag. On the other hand, the Americans were not only
foreigners as far as citizenship was concerned, but also functioned
by leave of a government that could terminate that leave without
accounting for it, or allowing appeals to it. This made for a riding
sense of double jeopardy. The common tongue did not guarantee
security. Always we were aware of the subtleties of arrogance when
people expressed amazement that our English was well spoken. So pervasive was this general climate that night after night found Sue at the dinner table discussions mounting her soapbox in defense of the American dream and the grace we have given the English tongue. She rose to the occasion because, unlike the average American missionary, she was more deeply sensitive to the contempt with which the colonials tended to regard the Americans. On sober reflection and much searching discussion with many of the missionaries, it became clear to us that they felt their stakes were different; certain basic commitments had been made to the government on their behalf by the organizations or institutions whose representatives they were. They had to be careful lest they might undo or counteract the tremendous good they felt they were doing in meeting the spiritual and human needs of thousands of Indians.

But for us there was investment in money, years, or even faith, reaching back over several generations. Once this awareness of difference was clear it had a curious effect on my mind; it at once freed me and bound me. It freed me to recognize immediately all that I felt and said in that land was the fruit of my own struggle toward a resolution of the problems created for me by the profession of the Christian religion. It bound me with a compassionate understanding of the nature of the dilemma for the most thoughtful American missionary and what must be the nature of his embarrassment by our presence, knowing what both of us knew about the limitations of the faith in changing and affecting the life of our own people. Out of this churning, a fresh, powerful sense of authority began to emerge, and it became the contagion that swept us along. We were prepared in context to deal with the vital issues that came to mind wherever we appeared.

At Christmas we were invited to spend the holidays with faculty friends, some Indian, some American, whom we had known in college or seminary back home. They chose to go up to Darjeeling for this vacation, and for us, after the rigors of south India, to spend these precious days seven thousand feet above sea level, within the sight of Mount Everest, was alluring. Some of the Americans had received gift packages from home, rare tins of coffee and other delectables for us to feast upon at the "top of the world."

Near the end of the Christmas feast came the pièce de résistance, a daring proposal for "valley dwellers" from the United States. We were invited to see the sun rise over Kinchinjunga. It would mean a two-mile climb up Tiger Hill, a circuitous route that made a gradual ascent. The schedule called for leaving at two o'clock in the morning. I accepted, but Sue and Eddie graciously declined.

The next day a few Indian students and I began the climb. It was the first exercise that I had had since leaving the ship. I was about twenty pounds overweight; it was obvious that the hospitality of every compound we visited was beginning to tell on me. I ate not only because I had come to enjoy the food, but for nourishment, energy, and strength to meet the schedule of every passing day. I had expected, therefore, that this excursion would be a little difficult—but it was terrible. I would walk about five hundred feet, spread my blanket out on the ground, and stretch out to rest. After much teasing and coaxing, I made it up to the top and was guided to a small pavilion.

It was completely dark. I could feel the presence of other people close at hand but could see no one. I knew that tourists from all over the world came here to witness the sunrise. Murmurs of conversations could be heard but not decoded. Then as dawn approached, everyone became silent. One could just hear now and then the sound of gentle breathing.

At first there was just a faint finger of pink in the sky, then suddenly the whole landscape burst into one burnished gold radiance: everything was clear. Beyond, the solitary glowing peak of Everest rose. The cameras were busy. We discovered that this view had not been visible for four weeks because of an overlay of heavy clouds. The glorious sight lasted no more than a minute; the clouds came together again and closed the view. I felt like Browning's "Paracelsus":

I am a wanderer; I remember well
One journey, how I feared the track was missed,
So long the city I desired to reach
Lay hid; when suddenly its spires afar
Flashed through the circling clouds; you may conceive
My transport . . .
WITH HEAD AND HEART

But I had seen the city and one such glance
No darkness could obscure . . .

When I returned, I refused to tell Sue what had happened. I teased her slyly, saying, "If you hadn't chosen a cozy sleep, and remained down in the valley, you would have gone up the mountain with me."

More than forty years have passed since that morning. It remains for me a transcendent moment of sheer glory and beatitude, when time, space, and circumstance evaporated and when my naked spirit looked into the depths of what is forbidden for anyone to see. I would never, never be the same again.

Needless to say, my family has heard this story many times, and there have been good-natured and spirited debates as to which is the truer view, that from the mountain top or that from the valley floor. Some years later, Sue wrote in the April chapter of Meditations for Women, dedicated to the Poet of India, her experiences of that morning, in defense of the "valley dweller."

Two friends were spending some days in the region of Darjeeling. One of them had persuaded their companion-guide to go with him to the top of Tiger Hill, so that he might catch the vision of sunset over the Himalayas. The plans were made; the hour set. They would start climbing at early morning in order to reach the summit for the one silver instant when Kanchinjunga would be flooded with rays of shimmering light.

The other friend remained in the valley. There were visits to make: A Buddhist priest in saffron robe would be sitting near a shop in a bazaar fingering his prayer wheel. Friendly street vendors would be peddling their wares of shining brass decorated with semi-precious turquoise. There would be salutations to the sunrise in a thousand different languages. "I shall not climb Tiger Hill. The valley is so pleasant. The object of my search is in the valley."

The mountain climber might return from his heights with an attitude of condescension toward the valley seeker, not perceiving that the preferences of their choosing indicated only the variation in their goals. Once the goal or quest of an individual is made clear, it is revealed that whether he searches mountain or valley, he finds his own "acre of diamonds" where he is.

As for going to Shantiniketan, Tagore's university, it was impor-
intercultural, interracial setting. A common ground would somehow be established.

I had two encounters with Tagore while there. One was the lecture he gave to the students assembled under a banyan tree. It was an unforgettable experience. He bypassed my mind and opened up an intimate acquaintance with the anatomy of my own thoughts, feelings, and religious intuitions. The next day Sue and I were invited to spend an hour with him in his little house on campus. We took seats in front of his chair. He sat looking at us, but also through and beyond us, and then he would make some statement, as if he had fixed my mind, his eyes, on our faces; then he would take off again. I felt his mind was going through cycles as if we were not even present. Then he would swing back from that orbit, settle in, take us into account again, and sweep out. It was not necessary to have an exchange of questions. It was as if we were there and being initiated into the secret working of a great mind and a giant spirit. But there was no point at which I felt the kind of identity with him that I later felt in Gandhi’s presence.

Sue stayed on at Shantiniketan a week longer, while the rest of us went on to Patna and Benares. She wanted to learn more about India’s ancient musical instruments, one of which, the veena, a priceless possession, had been given her by our host, a famous engineer and architect, in Hyderabad. Later, three American Negro women students, Marian Martin Banfield, Betty McCree Price, and Margaret Bush Wilson, spent a semester at Shantiniketan, supported by funds from lectures on the beauties of Indian civilization which Sue delivered at many campuses and communities in the United States and Canada on her return home.

We were within a few weeks of the time to return to the United States, sailing from Colombo, the port of arrival. This meant coming from northwest India down almost the entire length of the country to south India and then getting a boat across to Colombo. And we had not seen Mahatma Gandhi! It was during the second day of my lectures at the University of Bombay that I said to Sue, “I think I will go down to the post office and send a telegram to Mahatma Gandhi at his ashram to see if we can see him. We can’t go home without visiting him.” The next morning I left for the post office to send the telegram. I passed an Indian in khadi cloth wearing a Gandhi cap. Our eyes met as we passed, though we said nothing. When I had gone about fifty feet something made me turn around to look back at him just as he turned around to look back at me. He smiled; I smiled. We turned and came toward each other and when we met he said, “Are you, you?” And I said, “Yes.” He said, “Well, I have a letter for you from Gandhiji.” I said, “That’s wonderful because I am on my way to the post office now to send a telegram to him to see whether or not it is possible for us to see each other.”

I read his letter; he said he knew our time was drawing to a close, yet we hadn’t met. We must have a chance to talk. He was not at his ashram, but invited us to meet him at Bardoli, where he was resting for a few days, if our schedule would permit. The letter continued, “Bardoli is closer to Bombay than my ashram. But if you prefer, when your lectures are over, I will be back at the ashram and you can come there. If this is impossible I will come to see you.” I quickly canceled everything scheduled. Sue, Eddie, and I got the train to a designated station where we were met by Mr. Gandhi’s secretary at four o’clock in the morning. He took us to a mango grove in which there was a little bungalow tent, a place for Sue and Eddie to rest, while Gandhi’s secretary and I sat in the grove talking about Gandhi and his movement until daybreak. When daybreak came, we were served hard rolls and tea and some fruit. Immediately after this, we started on our journey. Soon we came into a native state, an area which, for political reasons, the British allowed a large measure of self-rule, and there we met a man. He was well known to Gandhi’s secretary and joined our party, even though he was not free to circulate outside the native state.

As the car drove up to an open field we saw a bungalow tent over which flew the flag of the Indian National Congress. Gandhi came out of the tent to greet us as the car came to a stop. His secretary turned to me and said, “This is the first time in all the years that we have been working together that I’ve ever seen him come out to greet a visitor so warmly.” We were introduced and invited to sit on the floor of a rather large room in the center of the tent where there were two or three other Indians. Then, to my amazement, the first thing Gandhi did was to reach under his
and take out an old silver watch, saying, "I apologize, but we must talk by the watch, because we have much to talk about and you have only three hours before you have to leave to catch your train back to Bombay."

He had questions. Never in my life have I been a part of that kind of examination: persistent, pragmatic questions about American Negroes, about the course of slavery, and how we had survived it. One of the things that puzzled him was why the slaves did not become Moslems. "Because," said he, "the Moslem religion is the only religion in the world in which no lines are drawn from within the religious fellowship. Once you are in, you are all the way in. This is not true in Christianity, it isn't true in Buddhism or Hinduism. If you had become Moslem, then even though you were a slave, in the faith you would be equal to your master."

He wanted to know about voting rights, lynching, discrimination, public school education, the churches and how they functioned. His questions covered the entire sweep of our experience in American society.

Finally, he looked at his watch and with surprise said, "Our time is almost gone and I haven't given you the opportunity to ask me any questions at all."

Sue asked, with a tone of urgency, under what circumstances Gandhi would come to America as the guest of Afro-Americans.

"The only conditions under which I would come would be that I would be able to make some helpful contributions toward the solution of the racial trouble in your country. I don't feel that I would have the right to try to do that unless or until I have won our struggle in India. And out of that discovery and disclosure I may be able to have some suggestions about the problems involving race relations in your country and the rest of the world."

Before we left he said that with a clear perception it could be through the Afro-American that the unadulterated message of nonviolence would be delivered to all men everywhere.

At that point we asked, "Why has your movement failed of its objectives, namely, to rid the country of the British?" His reply, as I reconstruct it over these years, is more pertinent to our concerns now than it was then. He said, in essence: "The effectiveness of a creative ethical ideal such as nonviolence, ahimsa, or no
instances, on the street on which the Hindu temple is located, the
temple is considered to be contaminated.”

I said, “How on earth did you attack such a thing as that?” He
was striking close to home with this. He said, “The first thing that
I did as a caste Hindu was to adopt into my family an outcaste
and make that person a member of my family, legally, and in all
the other ways. This announced to the other caste Hindus, ‘This
is what I mean by what I am saying.’ Then I changed the name
from outcaste to ‘Harijan,’ a word that means ‘Child of God.’”

His theory was that if he could make every caste Hindu, whenever
he referred to an outcaste, call him a “Child of God,” in that
act he would create within himself an acute moral congestion that
could not be resolved until his attitude was transformed.

“I became the spearhead of a movement for the building of a
new self-respect, a fresh self-image for the untouchables in Indian
society. I felt that the impact of this would be the release of en-
ergy needed to sustain a commitment to nonviolent direct action.”

With this explanation, our time came to a close. But before we
left, he asked, “Will you do me a favor? Will you sing one of your
songs for me? Will you sing ‘Were You There When They Crucif-
ied My Lord?’” He continued, “I feel that this song gets to the
root of the experience of the entire human race under the spread
of the healing wings of suffering.”

“My wife is a musician,” I said, “but the rest of us will join
her.” Under the tent in Bardoli in a strange land we three joined
in music as one heartbeat. Gandhiji and his friends bowed their
heads in prayer. When it was over there was a long silence and
there may have been a few words that Gandhi used in prayer; then
we got up to leave.

He gave Sue a basket of tropical fruit. At the door of the tent,
I asked, “Would you give me something?” as I gazed at the spin-
ning wheel beside him. “I would like a piece of cloth woven out
of material that you yourself have spun from the flax.” He asked
his secretary to make a note of it. Within a year from that time
I received in the mail a piece of cloth made from the thread that
had been spun by Gandhi himself.

At the final leavetaking I said, “Will you now, ending, answer
just one question? What do you think is the greatest handicap to

Jesus Christ in India?” It was apropos of something he had said
to me about Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount. I wanted to know
his real thought about the chief obstacle in his own country which
prevented the spread of Christianity. He answered, “Christianity
as it is practiced, as it has been identified with Western culture,
with Western civilization and colonialism. This is the greatest
enemy that Jesus Christ has in my country—not Hinduism, or
Buddhism, or any of the indigenous religions—but Christianity
itself.”

And with that we bade each other good-bye.

Within a few weeks we had completed our assignment in north
India and followed the way down the full length of the country to
Colombo, where we would take ship for Europe and America.
There were long stretches when each of us was engaged in a pri-
ivate world of rapidly shifting vignettes. Always I was overawed
by the sheer numbers of human beings ebbing and flowing like
the tides of the sea. There were special scenes of distilled beauty
such as the Taj Mahal by moonlight and again at dawn; the eerie
melodies coming out of the night; the eagerness of little village
boys pushing their way to our car, crying, “Hold! Hold! We want
to see!”

There was the unforgettable face—second only to Tagore’s, full
of agony and yearning for India’s independence, yet radiant with
the aura of a vast compassion, transcending all barriers of time
and space. It was the face of the young Madame Vijaya Lakshmi
Pandit, daughter of the distinguished Nehru family, whom we met
and talked with at the public meeting in Allahabad. We would see
this face again and again in after years, in the quality of her
fine performance, as the first woman president of the General
Assembly of the United Nations and as India’s High Commissioner
to London and Moscow.

We would always remember the men students at Judson College
in Burmah, coming to our window one minute after midnight to
wish us a “Happy New Year!” on January 1, 1936.

When we left India, our bags were filled with gifts from the col-
leges of India, Burmah, and Ceylon to be shared with American
faculties and students. A Russell’s viper embalmed in a huge glass
jar with smaller vials of assorted scorpion species not found in

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our country had been given us by the medical faculty of St. John's College in Agra for the Medical School of Howard University. Then the precious collection of poetic works especially inscribed to our students by Sarojini Naidu, the warm personality well known at the time as India's greatest woman poet-politician. We had spent some hours with her at smaller intimate social gatherings following the public meetings in Hyderabad.

There were gifts for our children in Geneva, sent by Indian friends. Soon they would come with our sister to meet us in Paris, where we would take the train to Le Havre and sail for home.

Among the many gifts of the spirit I was bringing back with me was the "feel" of a moment of vision standing in Khyber Pass looking down into Afghanistan as the slow camel train ambled by en route to India—it was there that I knew a way must be found to answer the persistent query of the Indian students about Christianity and the color bar.

The Bold Adventure
—San Francisco