

# Book on Gandhi offers many timely insights

*Gandhi on Christianity*, edited by Robert Ellsberg; Orbis Books (Maryknoll, N.Y., 1991); 135 pages; \$10.95.

By Monsignor William H. Shannon  
Guest contributor

In the wake of the Rodney King verdict and the subsequent riots in Los Angeles, it is appropriate to turn to a book about a man who all his life dealt with violence, yet steadfastly refused to deal with it in a violent manner.

More than anyone else, Gandhi has been responsible for bringing world attention to the power of non-violence as the only effective way of eliminating violence from a world so steeped in it. Christian leaders who have espoused non-violence as a way of life and as the most effective tactic for achieving peace have acknowledged their debt to Mohandas Gandhi.

It is a curious paradox that Gandhi first learned non-violence from studying Jesus' words and example, whereas many Christians have discovered the non-violence of Jesus from Gandhi.

While it is impossible to think of Gandhi without thinking of non-violence, it is not his understanding of non-violence, but his on-going dialogue with Christianity which is — as the title suggests — the chief focus of *Gandhi on Christianity*.

After a superb, perspective-giving introduction by Robert Ellsberg, the book's editor, the book has two parts: the first, about two-thirds of the book, is made up of remarks about Christianity in Gandhi's writings, interviews and speeches. His basic stance was that there is truth in all religions and that none can claim to possess the whole truth.

To him all religions are essentially true because they are all paths to the same truth. At the same time they are imperfect and liable to error and hence in constant need of growth and purification.

Gandhi's position should not, however, be equated with a religious indifferentism, which would say: "Believe whatever you want. It doesn't really matter." On the contrary, it was his conviction that what people believed did indeed matter and that all should live deeply and fully the truth they possessed and share it with others. Religious dialogue is a way of being enriched and purified by the truth possessed by others.

The book's remaining part is called "Christian Response" and consists of four essays by Christians who are clearly sympathetic to Gandhi and to what he has to say about Christianity.

Diana L. Eck, a professor of comparative religion at Harvard University, discusses Gandhian guidelines for interreligious dialogue. Ignatius Jesudasan, an Indian Jesuit with a degree from Marquette University, talks about Gandhi's Christology and the meaning he gave to the Christian belief that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God. In addition, James Douglass, a peace activist long dedicated to non-violence, comments on the influence that Gandhian insights could have on the living of Christian discipleship.

Finally, Bob McCahill, a Maryknoll priest who has worked in Bangladesh for 16 years, struggles with the meaning of missionary work in the new climate of interreligious dialogue. He expresses his belief in the need to forswear conversion as the goal of mission in favor of service and respectful presence among peoples of other cultures and religious views.

This book is a timely corrective to those who would still espouse a religious intolerance that would reject all other religions as harmful or at least as more or less useless.

Appropriately, it closes with the words of good Pope John XXIII: "Love one another. Seek rather what unites, not what may separate you from one another." Highly recommended.

Monsignor Shannon is professor emeritus at Nazareth College of Rochester.

## Bishop Clark to preside at liturgy marking farewell of long-serving sisters

ROCHESTER — Bishop Matthew H. Clark is scheduled to preside at a June 14 farewell celebration for the Misioneras Guadalupeanas del Espiritu Santo — Mexican sisters commonly known as the Hermanas Guadalupeanas. The celebration will take place from 6-9 p.m. at Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier Church, 34 Teresa St.

The last of the sisters from the Missionaries of Our Lady of Guadalupe and Holy Spirit is scheduled to leave Rochester June 30. Members of the congregation have served Hispanics in the Diocese of Rochester for the last 24 years.



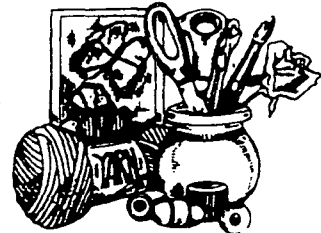
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In this photo from 1986, a boy stops to look at a statue of the late Mahatma Gandhi in New Delhi, India.

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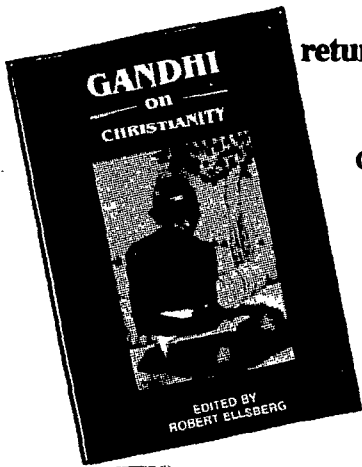
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Mohandas Gandhi is widely revered as one of the great moral prophets of the twentieth century. This book focuses on a less well-known area of his interest: his engagement with Jesus and Christianity.

This anthology, enhanced by thoughtful reflections from several Christian scholars of Gandhi's philosophy, highlights Gandhi's contributions to interreligious dialogue, the self-critical reform of Christian mission, and the more faithful imitation of Jesus.

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