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Issues of War and Peace: Is Religion More of the Problem and What Are Mahatma Gandhi's Insights?

Douglas Allen

Department of Philosophy, The University of Maine, Orono, ME 04469, USA; dallen@maine.edu

Abstract: When examining the history of religions and dominant religious narratives, institutions, cultures, ideologies, and practices in the contemporary world, one is tempted to conclude that religion is more of the problem in relating to diverse issues of war and peace. Dominant religions and religious cultures seem overwhelmingly to be causes, express systemic structures, and provide ideological, theological, and philosophical justifications for violence, war, militarism, intolerance, divisiveness, oppression, injustice, hatred, environmental destruction, and anti-democratic hierarchical domination. Can religious culture also be a positive force for nonviolence, peace, love, compassion, justice, tolerance and mutual respect, and harmonious and sustainable relations with human and nonhuman life, nature, and the cosmos? A universal, phenomenological, structural model of the dialectic of the sacred and the profane allows us to understand how and why religious culture has been such a negative force, but also how it can develop as a positive force. In that regard, Mahatma Gandhi, the best known and most influential proponent of nonviolence, offers a complex and insightful approach to religious culture in ways that are most significant for relating issues of war, peace, and religious culture today. What I propose to show, by focusing on the phenomenology of religion and the insights of Mahatma Gandhi, is that the full picture of religious culture, violence, war, and peace is complex, nuanced, and contradictory, and there are structural and contextualized openings for understanding ways that religious culture can be a positive force for nonviolence and peace.

Keywords: violence; nonviolence; war; peace; religious culture; phenomenology; sacred; profane; Gandhi

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1. Introduction

Over the decades, issues of violence and war have often dominated the news, and when this essay was written, issues of violence and war continue to dominate the news. We are aware of the daily tragic reports of war violence, gun violence, and other kinds of violence; of the bombings and terrorizing and deaths of innocent civilians; of the weaponization and militarization of "normal" everyday living; and of the economic and political basis and ideological justifications for violence and war. These daily ongoing expressions of violence shape our dominant narratives.

These reports, issues, interpretations, and explanations of violence and war are often connected with views of religion and religious culture. When it comes to understanding contemporary violence and war, is religion a primary cause? Or is religion a secondary symptom? Or is religion not really a significant contributor?

When examining thousands of years of the history of religions, as well as the dominant religious narratives, institutions, cultures, ideologies, and practices in the contemporary world, one is tempted to conclude that religion is more of the problem rather than the solution in relating to diverse issues of war and peace. Dominant religions and religious cultures seem overwhelmingly to be causes, express systemic structures, and provide ideological, theological, and philosophical justifications for violence, war, militarism, intolerance, divisiveness, oppression, injustice, hatred, environmental destruction, and anti-democratic hierarchical domination. One can easily conclude that addressing the problems of so

much violence and war necessarily involves opposition to religion and contemporary religious cultures.

The question remains whether religion and religious culture can also be part of the solution in confronting issues of war and peace. Can religion be a force for nonviolence, peace, love, compassion, justice, tolerance and mutual respect, and harmonious and sustainable relations with human and nonhuman life, nature, and the cosmos?

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869–1948, better known as Mahatma Gandhi) is the best known and most influential proponent of nonviolence (*ahimsa*). His view of nonviolence informs his approach to war and peace. He also offers a complex and insightful approach to religious culture that challenges traditional, hierarchical, immoral, violent, untruthful, institutionalized religions. Gandhi does not provide the exclusive, absolute, prefect solution or even all of the most adequate solutions. Nevertheless, I propose that our selectively and creatively rereadings, reinterpretations, and reapplications of Gandhi's insightful approach offer significant ways for relating issues of war, peace, and religious culture in positive, meaningful, contextualized formulations today.[1]

2. Violence and War

"Violence" is always central to any examination of issues addressing war and peace. In its extremely broad and often vague uses, we may clarify two meanings of the term violence. First, there is the descriptive meaning of violence as a force that is strong, intense, immoderate, fierce, and rough. It is often presented as value-free or value-neutral. Such accounts are claimed to be descriptively accurate in allowing us to describe factually and objectively a human and nonhuman world that expresses violence. Indeed, some maintain that such violence, far from being opposed to "peace", is necessary for peace. Second, there are definitions of violence with strong negative meanings. Violence is a rough force that involves assault, aggression, harm, and violation. It is opposed to peace. Peace involves minimizing the negative forces of violence and maximizing the positive forces of nonviolence.

As we shall see, we need to broaden and deepen our understanding of violence (and nonviolence) beyond the usual narrow meanings of violence as overt physical force. In examining the issues of violence, war, and peace, we'll see the need to address inner psychological violence, economic and political and social violence, cultural and religious violence, and other interconnected dimensions of violence. While often granting that religion is being expressed as an overwhelmingly violent negative force today, we shall also see how Gandhi and religious cultures challenge us to consider nonviolence and religious nonviolence as expressing forces that refrain from violence and are the strongest, active, positive, moral, truthful, transformative forces needed for addressing issues of war, violence, and peace.

As with "violence", the term "war" also has several diverse and often vague meanings. In more common, narrow, clear senses, war is declared by nations, although sometimes not explicitly declared, and involves the use of force of arms and other violent forces of nations against other nations. This narrower sense also involves the use of such armed force and other violent forces within nations as evidenced in civil wars. There are also many broader and often vaguer senses of war that involve active hostility, conflict, and violence. For example, since the 1980s, citizens in the USA have been repeatedly told that they are involved in the "war on drugs". Over the decades, a dominant U.S. narrative has invoked the "war on terrorism" and the even vaguer "war on evil". In 2022 in the polarized political situation in the USA, members of the Republican Party have been socialized by the broader, hostile, violent, war narratives with the need to declare war on and destroy the other political party as threatening patriotic true America and its true, white, Christian, exceptional, superior, foundational past and its exceptional superior future that is under attack.

In this regard, religious culture over the centuries and continuing today expresses both the narrow and the broad senses of narratives and practices of war. Many dominant

religions declare war on the evil doers and the sinners within their religions, on the evil believers of the other religions, and on the evil secularists who reject religion. In the broader senses, religions today declare war on those upholding reproductive rights and the right to abortion and equal rights for women; those opposed to the death penalty of capital punishment and opposed to the proliferation of nuclear weapons; those recognizing the rights of homosexuals and transgender persons; those focusing on the need for educational and other awareness of the history of slavery and institutionalized racism, antisemitism, Islamophobia, and the genocide of Indigenous peoples; those focusing on climate change and environmental destruction, and more.

It is revealing and sometimes shocking to antiwar nonviolent proponents and admirers of the nonviolent Mahatma Gandhi to learn that he often uses the language of violence and war, albeit in figurative, symbolic, mythic, and allegorical ways. For example, he often refers to his *Satyagrahis* and other followers as peace warriors, and he repeatedly formulates his philosophy, movements, campaigns, and practices as wars and battles against immorality, evil, violence, and untruth.

When asked, most people easily grant that war is violent, harmful, unfortunate, and undesirable. War is easily contrasted with peace that is usually regarded as positive, nonviolent, and desirable. We would like to live in peace. Nevertheless, just as most people agree that violence is sometimes necessary, they qualify their views of war so that war is sometimes regarded as necessary to realize peace. In addition, just as we noted the need to broaden and deepen our understanding of violence (and nonviolence), we shall emphasize the need to broaden and deepen our understanding of war (and peace). For example, in examining issues of war, peace, and religion, we must address how war is multidimensional extending beyond overt, physical warfare to include economic warfare, psychological warfare, cultural warfare, and more.

This section is entitled "violence and war". We may clarify some of the relations between these two terms. Violence is the much broader term. War is always violent (overtly, covertly, structurally, relationally, multidimensionally, morally, ontologically), but most violence extends far beyond the defining characteristics of war. For example, various religious cultures and various nonreligious cultures regard our existential human condition in the world as violent, our human nature as partially or completely violent, our contextualized situated need to provide adequate food, housing, natural resources, and labor power as violent, and more. All war is violent, but most violence is not war.

3. War and Peace

At the first most transparent level of expression, war and peace are diametrically opposed. When we are engaged in war, we are not at peace. Some of the strongest and most dramatic scriptural teachings of the Biblical Hebraic Prophets, the Christian Sermon on the Mount and Social Gospel, the foundational texts of Islam, and in other religious cultures uphold the ideals, values, and practices of peace and the need to limit or refrain from war that is violent, immoral, and evil.[2]

Nevertheless, the use of the term "peace" is often self-serving, vague, diversionary, and questionable. When asserting that peace is not war, such views of peace are usually expressed as the absence of war, especially overt violent war. However, such views of peace do not guarantee a deeper, broader, and more adequate expression of peace. For example, as seen in broadening and deepening our understanding of multidimensional violence, nonviolence, war, and peace, so-called "normal" conditions of peace as simply not war can be very violent and unpeaceful.

In addition, just as war is multidimensional with many diverse meanings, so is peace. Throughout history and continuing today, political, economic, religious, and nonreligious contextual expressions of peace as the absence of war may be completely devoid of the experiences and expressions of inner peace, class and caste relations of peace, gender and racial relations of peace, cultural and religious relations of peace. Often what is presented as "peace" is what Martin Luther King, Jr. and others analyze as a "negative peace", a

peace expressing injustice, which is no peace at all.[3] As Gandhi and others repeatedly tell us, what we often express and uphold as "peace" is a rather passive acceptance and even complicity with contextualized situations of violence, immorality, hatred, divisiveness, and injustice. That is why it is central to Gandhi's philosophy, ethics, spirituality, and action-transforming practices that we nonviolently intervene, challenge, and disrupt the far-from-peaceful status quo. Such educating, organizing, selfless sacrificing, resisting, and courageous disrupting are necessary for positive peace, real peace, the deeper and broader senses of peace shaped by morality, justice, nonviolence, and truth.

I propose such an approach to peace, war, violence, and religion, as informed by the writings and action-oriented practices of Gandhi and King and others, for challenging many dominant religious cultural perspectives. We are often instructed that if we adopt the true religion, the true religious teachings and rituals and other practices, we are guaranteed absolute inner peace, often in this world and definitely in heaven or the next world. This is often the same dramatic claim by many promoting the guaranteed results of complete inner peace if we adopt their specific forms of meditation, yoga, prayer, and other practices. By contrast, our approach to religious culture and peace attempts to disrupt such guaranteed perspectival claims. If we live in a world of overwhelming violence, hatred, oppression, poverty, inequality, and war, we should be alarmed, disturbed, engaged, and called to action. Indeed, inner peace and outer peace are both essential, are dialectically related, as they mutually interact and mutually shape each other. As previously stated, there is no peace, inner or outer peace, without justice, just as there is no justice without peace.

In this section on war and peace, similar comments can be made regarding religious and nonreligious cultural orientations toward war. As seen in the formulations of "greater jihad" and as found throughout religious cultures, in our embrace of true peace, we are engaged in our inner war with the immorality, hatred, greed, egotism, violence, and other impurities and evils within each of us (and within our religion). This inner war is dialectically interconnected with our outer war. We increase our awareness, become greatly disturbed, disrupt our passivity and complicity, resist, and engage in the outer war of transforming the world of so much violence, suffering, and lack of inner and outer peace. Such a peace-oriented inner and outer war is needed to transform and overcome the dominant multidimensional and structural values, theories, perspectives, and practices of war as destructive negative force promoted by religious cultures.

4. Religion as a Negative Force

Eleven years ago, I was invited by the editors of a book, entitled *Patterns in Philosophy and Sociology of Religions*, to submit a manuscript. My submission, entitled "Religion and Violence in the Contemporary World", was published as Chapter 1. I noted at the time how the complex and troubling expressions of violence often expressed interconnected relations with religion. These violent relations frequently dominated the daily news. These violent relations, often expressed as religious violence, frequently dominated the tragic lives of suffering and death of many hundreds of millions of human beings. They challenged us with the alarming prospects of a very dangerous, insecure, and unsustainable future. Noted were such examples as the many forms of terrorism, Afghanistan and the Taliban, Iraq and Shia, Sunni, and other religious and ethnic conflicts, Palestine, Israel, Pakistan, India, and more. I also noted that when it came to issues of violence and religion, the USA was not an exception. Indeed, some of the most dangerous forces of violence and religious violence existed and were increasingly empowered in the United States.[4]

Has the situation in 2022 improved? Far from it: If anything, the alarming situation has worsened. The Taliban have regained power as the rulers in Afghanistan. Russia is increasingly involved in violence and war. Violence, conflict, war, and lack of nonviolence and peace characterize life in Ukraine, throughout the Middle East, Syria, Turkey, Yemen, Hungary, Poland, Myanmar/Burma, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Mali, and much more. The alarming situation in the USA involving many of the most dangerous expressions of violence and religious violence has greatly worsened: the

rise and dominant power of Christian fundamentalists and others identifying with the violent religious right under Trump and serving as a base of the Republican Party; the packing of an activist Supreme Court with its extreme, conservative, militant, Christian justices; the anti-democratic insurrection of 6 January 2022 in Washington, D.C. and its ongoing violent expressions; the rise of violent xenophobic nationalism, white supremacy, oppressive patriarchy and homophobia, antisemitism, Islamophobia; the increasing dangers of nuclear catastrophe, and so much more.

In most of these examples of so much contemporary violence, religion is integrally related to the violence. The nonviolent religious forces for peace and against war are usually passive, silent, powerless, and ineffective when contrasted with the overwhelming religious forces promoting and ideologically justifying violent conflicts and war. It is easy to conclude that when it comes to violence, war, and peace, religion is a negative force and is an essential part of the problem and not the solution.

In noting the etymology of the term "religion", it is easy to recognize why religious culture has so often promoted and justified religion as a negative force that is extremely violent. *Religio* is relational and indicates that two radically different components or terms are integrally connected or related at the foundation and the heart of religion. What are those radically different terms that are brought into integral interconnected relations in religious culture and distinguish religion from nonreligious cultural perspectives and orientations? Although specific language varies widely depending on different religious cultures and their contextualized orientations, religions distinguish and integrally relate and interconnect what is, on the one hand, expressed as God, ultimate reality, heaven, the transcendent, the absolute, the infinite, the eternal, etc., with what, on the other hand, is expressed as the limited and impure human world, the false and illusory, the imminent, the relative, the finite, the temporal, etc. In suggesting how such an approach and religious orientation has so often led to religious cultures promoting violence and war, I will now provide several of many possible explanations.

Religious cultures in relating to what is experienced and expressed as God or Ultimate Reality understandably assume and believe that their religion, faith, scriptures, divine sources of revelation, rituals, and leaders reveal and connect them with goodness, truth, and reality. That is why they identify as religious and embrace their religious culture as essential in their lives. The many components of their religious culture provide them with the trusted pipeline to sacred values, salvation, and absolute reality. What about those others: nonbelievers, infidels, members of other religions and faiths, atheists, secularists, etc.? They do not have our trusted pipeline to our God, salvation, goodness, and reality. In fact, they usually reject what we believe and maintain as the absolute truth and reality. Although it is not necessarily or logically entailed, the overwhelming strong militant move in the history of religions and in religious cultures today has been to the view and corresponding practices that the others are immoral, evil, untruthful, deniers of our revealed absolute reality. Even more, like a cancer, they are a threat that will destroy us if we do not protect our religious culture and if we do not control and destroy the cancerous other.

Such a religious approach and perspective easily moves to embracing the position of the extreme necessity of violence and even war. Since we have the exclusive absolute channel or pipeline to God or absolute reality, the perfect blueprint of religious reality, the only true reality, we know that violence and war are often necessary. God is on our side, not on the side of the nonbelievers. More than that, we are commanded to engage in extreme violence, destruction, and war, even though it involves self-sacrifice, suffering, killing, and being killed. It is our religious duty, and there can be no higher duty.

This may allow us to understand why religious cultures are often the strongest, most violent, and most destructive, war-promoting, negative forces today. Countless examples can be found in the dominant narrative expressions of religious cultures throughout the world. I will only illustrate this by referring briefly to the some of the religious culture of the powerful, militant, Christian Right in the U.S. today. We possess the exclusive absolute truth and reality, and we are on a Christian mission from God in our present-day multi-

billion-dollar crusade waging war on evil. In this violent divine war, we are the strongest supporters of unlimited weaponization, including U.S. nuclear superiority. We are the strongest supporters of the death penalty and the U.S. in leading the world in executions. We are the strongest supporters of military strikes, invasions, and occupations of other counties, especially those that are dominated by evil non-Christian cultures, or, at least, not our kind of militant Christianity. We support a violent militant Israel as Christians, even though Jews reject the true God, because this is a necessary preliminary stage in our Christian theology.

Without providing numerous additional examples of this violent, militant, extreme, Christian religious culture in the U.S. today, we may note something truly alarming that illustrates how this religious culture expresses religion as such a negative force. It might seem that any religious culture that promotes the values of peace, love, kindness, compassion, the Golden Rule, etc., would be horrified by the numerous examples and threats in the U.S, and throughout the contemporary world of the humanly caused death of hundreds of millions of human beings, genocide, endless war, nuclear holocaust, climate change with the destruction of human and nonhuman life, and much more. We would be wrong. The powerful Christian Right in the U.S.—and one can give similar examples of other religious cultures throughout the world—does not fear and is not horrified by such extreme violence and destruction. Just the opposite: It welcomes them! Overwhelming destructive religious violence is welcome as glorious, blissful, ecstatic, and necessary for realizing the preconditions for the Second Coming, the "End Time", the "Rapture", and the time of ultimate purification and salvation, when all true believers will be saved in the eternal blissful paradise of heaven and the nonbelievers will be confined to eternal damnation in hell.

Once again, since we the true believers have faith and are certain that we, and only we, possess the only pipeline to God, the sacred, and reality, we are prepared to use violence, war, and any other means necessary to defend and spread our religious culture with its one true reality and to limit, control, and violently defeat the nonbelievers with their false and dangerous religious cultures. One can easily recognize why such perspectives regarding religious cultures have promoted religious violence, war, and other multidimensional and structural expressions of religion as a negative force.

If what we have already presented were the full picture, we could now provide a definitive response to our question of whether religion is more of a problem regarding issues of war and peace in religious culture. Religion would seem to be such a negative force that it is obviously more of a problem, if not the major problem. What I propose to show in the next two sections, on the phenomenology of religion and the insights of Mahatma Gandhi, is that the full picture of religious culture, violence, war, and peace is much more complex, nuanced, and contradictory, and there are structural and contextualized openings for understanding ways that religious culture can be a positive force for nonviolence and peace.

5. A Phenomenological Structural Model of Religion

In this section, I shall present, in greatly decontextualized and oversimplified ways, a universal, phenomenological, structural paradigm of religion that is intended to express what is distinctive about religious culture. This model can help us to distinguish religious from nonreligious cultures. This universal paradigm, model, and theory of religion may clarify what is distinctive about religious culture and allow us to understand better religious perspectives on war and peace, including Gandhian, non-Gandhian, and anti-Gandhian religious approaches, interpretations, and practices.

Following the approach of philosophical phenomenology, I attempt as much as possible to adopt the phenomenological *epoché*, in which scholars suspend their own presuppositions and value judgments so that they can empathize with and then describe the perspectives of the others being studied. In that regard, I attempt to formulate the structural dialectic of the sacred as experienced and expressed by religious cultures, describing

their normative claims of the nature of ultimate reality, but without offering any scholarly judgments on my part as to whether such clams are justified.[5]

As we have noted, "religion" is a very vague term with many diverse and contradictory uses and meanings, some very violent, but others promoting love, compassion, tolerance, and nonviolent peace. This vagueness about "religion" is expressed in a frequent distinction made by many people, including most of my philosophy students in recent decades, who want to indicate that there is something more in their lives than dominant material, scientific, limited values and worldviews. They assert that they are "spiritual", not religious. They clearly want to reject the dominant institutionalized religion of their socialized upbrings or of the dominant society, but when asked, it is not clear what they mean by the extremely vague, very varied, and often contradictory uses and meaning of "the spiritual".

The universal phenomenological paradigm that follows is intended to include all of the dominant traditional religious cultures, the dissenting and resisting religious cultures, and those who use terms such as the spiritual to express their alternate cultures. Following the lead of Mircea Eliade and other phenomenologists of religion, Emile Durkheim and other sociologists of religions, key ethnologists and other structural anthropologists, and other scholars, we shall not restrict our terminology to God, Allah, Soul, Brahman, Nirvana, etc., since various religious cultures do not use and even strongly reject such concepts, values, practices, and goals. Our essential model is meant to be universal in including all diverse religious formulations.

That is why, following Eliade and others, we'll use the inclusive language of "the sacred" and "the profane". The sacred and the profane express two human existential orientations, two human modes of being in the world, two structures of consciousness, two metaphysical/theological worldviews about the nature of reality. The dialectic of the sacred reveals the essential process of sacralization through which religious human beings and their religious cultures express their faiths, beliefs, and practices regarding what is transcendent and ultimately real and how we can experience, connect, and relate to that ultimate reality in our profane and limited existence in this world. This complex dynamic process of the dialectic of the sacred and the profane is, of course, from the perspective of religious culture. Nonreligious cultures reject the ultimate reality of the transcendent sacred and the reality of its process of sacralization.[6]

We shall formulate three structures in the dialectic of the sacred and the profane. First, religion and religious culture affirm the most radical qualitative separation, the most radical dichotomization, the most radical oppositional dialectical relation between the sacred and the profane. This is not the usual nonreligious distinction of differentiation and dichotomization as a matter of degree: more or less intelligent, more or less ethical, more or less powerful, etc. From the religious perspective, the dichotomized terms of the sacred and the profane are radically different in kind: absolute or relative, transcendent or imminent, supernatural or natural, infinite or finite, eternal or temporal, omnipotent or limited in power, omniscient or limited in knowledge, etc.

Second, in the universal structure of the dialectic of the sacred, these radically dichotomized categories, concepts, and values that are absolutely different in kind are connected through a uniquely religious paradoxical relation.[7] What is paradoxical to "normal" nonreligious experience and thinking is the religious claim that what is absolute, perfect, infinite, unconditioned, eternal, supernatural, etc., reveals itself through limited, finite, temporal, historical, natural phenomena. This paradoxical structural relation can also be expressed in the reverse terms of the dialectical movement: Words, symbols, myths, scriptural passages, human beings, animals, the sun, mountains, rivers, etc., paradoxically reveal and connect us with the radically and qualitatively different transcendent sacred that is beyond the limited, imperfect, natural, temporal, historical, linguistic, contextualized world of human existence. From the nonreligious perspective and human existential mode of being, the religious claim to this paradoxical relation makes no sense, is irrational, is illogical, and illustrates confused and backward thinking. From the religious perspective, this paradoxical relation is structurally essential for the revelation of truth and ultimate reality.

Third, religious culture embraces the dichotomized paradoxical structure of the dialectic of the sacred as always entailing a radical evaluation and choice. The sacred and the profane, the supernatural and the natural, the eternal and the temporal, God/the Divine and the human, etc., are not symmetrical relational terms. They express the most radical, asymmetrical, normative relation in which the sacred, the transcendent, the supernatural, the eternal, etc. is evaluated by religious culture as the absolute ultimate reality. This is not some abstract, cognitive, intellectually detached, unbiased and "objective" evaluation by religious persons. The structural evaluation involves the total religious existential mode of being, lived and expressed on all levels of consciousness, including the conscious and unconscious, the emotional and the imaginative, the individual and social and cosmic relations.

In addition, this sacred mode of being with its evaluation of the sacred and the profane always involves the most radical choice essential to the existential orientation and worldview of religious culture. The sacred as ultimate reality is chosen as the source, basis, and solution for all key issues and questions facing human beings and their cultures. The chosen sacred allows religious culture to understand and experience the solutions to questions regarding the creation of humankind, tribes, clans, the earth, and the cosmos; the religious nature of ethics and how to resolve ethical issues; the nature of violence, nonviolence, war, peace, and how to resolve previously noted difficult issues; social, class, caste, gender, racial, ethnic, and environmental issues; issues of eschatology, salvation, and what happens that transcends mortality and our imperfect human world, and more.

Without enlarging this structural formulation of the dialectic of the sacred and the profane to add other related dimensions and characteristics, we may stop now to reflect on how this relates to the general topic of this essay. One can recognize how the three essential, universal, phenomenological structures can accommodate and easily contribute to the troubling formulations in earlier sections, seen most clearly in the previous section of religion and religious culture as an overwhelmingly negative force of violence, hatred, divisiveness, intolerance, and war.

My religious culture possesses knowledge of the absolute truth and reality of the dichotomized sacred (God, heaven, the soul, morality, salvation) while the profane religious and nonreligious cultures of others do not possess this knowledge. My religious culture understands and experiences the paradoxical relation through which that absolute ultimate is revealed while other cultures lack this paradoxical revelation so that they deny and threaten the revealed ultimate reality. My religious culture evaluates and chooses the exclusive, absolute, sacred reality while other religious and nonreligious cultures lack this essential evaluation and instead choose to live lives of ignorance, immorality, sin, evil, etc. Once again, expressing the phenomenological structures of the dialectic of the sacred and the profane, we can recognize why religious cultures have so often promoted multidimensional violence and war in defending the faith and controlling and destroying the others who deny the sacred and promote cultures based on the profane.

Nevertheless, the phenomenological structural dialectic of the sacred and the profane does not necessarily lead to such disturbing conclusions. First, the dialectic of the radically dichotomized sacred could generate religious culture in which we embrace, formulate, and practice perspectives that emphasize love, kindness, compassion, empathy, tolerance, our interconnectedness with all human and nonhuman life and nature. Religious culture might then promote nonviolence and peace and attempt, as much as is contextually possible, to avoid or at least minimize violence and war.

The second universal phenomenological structure of the dialectic of the sacred and the profane could lead to diverse, pluralistic, inclusivist perspectives that acknowledge that other religious cultures may experience and express the essential paradoxical relation of the sacred and the profane in offering different legitimate approaches to and disclosures of truth and reality. Indeed, as Mahatma Gandhi submits, we may uphold our religious culture while engaging with and learning from other religious cultures.

The third formulation of the dialectic of the sacred with its essential phenomenological structure of evaluation and choice can also provide positive constructive openings and

valorizations for religious culture. Human beings, their human relations, and their human religious cultures are always, to a greater or to a less extent, expressions of our existential mode of being in the world as limited, often mistaken, finite, conditioned, imperfect, egotistical, greedy, hateful, cruel, violent, immoral, and sinful beings. Therefore, to claim that any individual, group, or religious culture possess the exclusive perfect knowledge of the absolute evaluation of sacred and profane and the resulting exclusive choice of the transcendent sacred is arrogant, ignorant, illusory, and dangerous. Put differently, we act as if we were God with absolute knowledge of truth and reality. Once again, as Mahatma Gandhi submits, while affirming our faith and religious culture, we should be humbler and more self-critical in refraining from violently imposing our religious evaluation and choice on others.

In summary, our phenomenological structural paradigm of the sacred and the profane essential to religious cultures does not necessarily commit us to the view of the sacred, God, or the transcendent ultimate reality as inherently or essentially violent or as inherently or essentially nonviolent. Similarly, the universal model of the dialectic of the sacred and the profane does not necessarily commit us to the view of profane, limited, spatial, temporal, historical, situated human beings as inherently or essentially violent or as inherently or essentially nonviolent. In the next section, I shall focus on an approach to religious culture that emphasizes nonviolence and peace.

6. Some of Mahatma Gandhi's Insights on Religion, Nonviolence, and Peace

Formulating Mahatma Gandhi's presuppositions, values, concepts, and practices regarding religion and religious culture must include very dynamic, complex, at times contradictory, contextualized variables, relations, and general structures. In thousands of passages, Gandhi affirms his faith, his religious beliefs, and his identification as deeply religious. However, it is often not clear what this means. What is Gandhi's religion, his religious culture, and his necessary characteristics for living a religious life, and how does this inform his commitment to nonviolence and peace?

In many passages, Gandhi identifies his religion as Hinduism, but he then acknowledges that his religion has been deeply shaped by the insights of Jainism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Tolstoy, Ruskin, and others. He boldly claims that his Hinduism even includes all of the nonviolent truths that he believes express the essence of all other religions.[8] In many passages, selectively appropriated by Hindu Vedantists, and especially recently by various nondualistic Advaitins, Gandhi indicates his personal preference for the religious view of the unity and oneness of the absolute ultimate spiritual reality expressed as Atman-Brahman. In many more passages, Gandhi expresses his religious faith in a personal theistic God (Rama, Krishna, or other expressions), as the focus of his prayers, as sustaining him in times of darkness and despair. and as revealing to him the "inner voice" of truth, morality, spirituality, and reality.

In key passages, Gandhi submits that his approach to understanding religion is not limited by religious language, concepts, rituals, scriptures, and other religious phenomena. Striking, in that regard, are Gandhi's passages in which he reverses his earlier, more traditional view of "God is Truth", in which truth is one of many divine attributes. Gandhi embraces what he now takes to be the more adequate, inclusivist, spiritual view of "Truth is God".[9] In such a perspectival understanding, truth may be God in many religious interpretations, and truth may be interpreted differently in religious perspectives of ultimate reality without reference to or with the rejection of "God". Gandhi also wants to include and respect very diverse, atheistic, agnostic, moral, and spiritual views that focus on truth, but that do not have any religious identification.

In his approach to and identification with Hinduism and with religion, Gandhi embraces the view that ancient, traditional, and other religious cultures express the deepest insights, values, and teachings regarding truth, nonviolence, peace, ethics, selfless service, harmonious living, sustainability, and reality. Nevertheless, Gandhi's approach is qualified, nuanced, and complex. He does not romanticize, idealize, and extol Hinduism and

religion in the dogmatic, subjective, uncritical manner of many Hindu and other religious believers. Just the opposite: He is extremely critical of much of traditional Hinduism as expressing violent and untruthful teachings and practices upholding hierarchical class and caste exploitation, patriarchal oppression of women, oppression of *dalits* ("untouchables", "outcastes"), oppression of lepers and other shunned and persecuted peoples, supporting ethnic and religious divisions and conflicts, lack of hygiene, and more. Similarly, he appreciates but is critical of other religious cultures, as expressed, strikingly, in his claim that dominant institutionalized Christianity and most Christians do not understand or practice the essential Christian truth, and they have no right to impose their violent untruthful Christianity on Hindus and other non-Christians.

The key to understanding Gandhi's philosophical approach to religious culture, violence, nonviolence, war, and peace is found in his organic and holistic methodology, interpretive framework, ethical and philosophical and spiritual perspective emphasizing the essential unity and interconnectedness of truth and reality. In such an organic holistic interpretation, we could start with any of the key concepts and principles and then show how they are integrally, relationally, and structurally interconnected with all other essential concepts and principles.

Thus, in formulating key Gandhian insights in this section, we could start with Gandhi's view of true religious culture and then analyze how it is interconnected and unified in complex dynamic ways with *satya* (truth, what is real), *ahimsa* (nonviolence, love), *satyagraha* (firmness on truth), *swaraj* (self-rule, freedom), *sarvodaya* (well-being, uplifting of all), *swadeshi* (self-sufficiency using one's own local and national goods), *aparigraha* (nonpossessiveness), "the constructive program" ("constructive work"), and more. As integrally interconnected, religious culture is caused and conditioned by the other essential values, concepts, and principles, and it in turn causes and conditions them in an ongoing, open-ended, contextually significant process of truth and untruth, nonviolence and violence, peace and war, etc.

Gandhi most often affirms that his two major, foundational, constituting, essential concepts, principles, and ideals are *satya* (truth) and *ahimsa* (nonviolence). That is why we cannot understand his views on religious culture, nonviolence, and peace without understanding his underlying methodological, ethical, and ontological interpretive framework of *satya* and *ahimsa* and their dynamic structural interconnectedness.

Presented here in a very brief and inadequate way, one can grasp Gandhi's focus on the Sanskrit meaning of *sat* (what really exists, is real, is unchangeable and eternal, etc.). For Gandhi, *satya* expresses what is true, real, being; not some abstract detached metaphysical essence, but rather the truth-force (religious-force, soul-force, moral-force, the strongest force) that expresses how what unifies us with reality is more essential than what divides and separates us. This most power truth-force brings us together in harmonious, unifying, interconnected, truthful relations.

Similarly, we may briefly and inadequately note Gandhi's focus on *ahimsa*, the concept, relational value, and structural principle for which Gandhi is best known and is most influential. Gandhi's epistemological, moral, social, economic, political, religious, and ontological perspective is informed by the Sanskrit *a-himsa* (no-harm, no-injury, usually translated into English as nonviolence). Unlike many philosophical and religious views, *ahimsa* is not some abstract, eternal, metaphysical essence. Instead, for Gandhi, *ahimsa* is a dynamic nonviolent force (love-force, moral-force, truth-force, the strongest force). *Ahimsa* as this most powerful nonviolent force organically and holistically brings us together in harmonious, unifying, interconnected, moral, loving, compassionate, selfless, purified, meaningfully developed and truthful relations.

Ahimsa and *satya* are integrally related. Most often, Gandhi submits that nonviolence is the means, and truth is the end. Although it is not always clear to us in the short term, we cannot use violent means to realize the ends of truth and reality. Nevertheless, in other passages, Gandhi reverses this relation. Truth is also the means, and nonviolence is the end. We cannot use untruthful means to realize the ends of nonviolence, love, and peace.

In still other striking passages, Gandhi insightfully maintains that *ahimsa* and *satya* are like two sides of the same coin. They express our two limited human approaches, two limited perspectives, two limited names and classifications of the one, true, pure, spiritual, ultimate reality.[10]

How does this relate to religious culture, nonviolence, and peace? On the first and most evident level of Gandhi's insightful formulations, we repeatedly find his causal, conditioned, means-ends interpretations. Using immoral, violent, untruthful means—overtly, physically, and on the more complex multidimensional and structural levels of linguistic, psychological, economic, political, religious, cultural, and other experiences and expressions—will cause and condition immoral, violent, untruthful ends. We then become entrapped in endless vicious means-ends cycles of hatred, greed, exploitation, oppression, alienation, suffering, violence, war, and conflict. Gandhi's philosophical, ethical, religious, contextually engaged project is to raise awareness of and mobilize action-oriented resistance to the violent and untruthful means-ends causes and conditions. Thus, Gandhi's positive constructive means-ends vision is to break and transform the vicious cycles and replace them with new means-ends causal conditions and new cycles of hope, love, compassion, caring, kindness, ego-transcending selfless service, freedom from possessiveness and the need to dominate, real equality, decentralized democratic empowerment, nonviolence, peace, and developed meaningful and sustainable living.

What is usually not recognized is Gandhi's more radical ontological (metaphysical, theological) move in which he boldly claims that religious cultures that promote violence and war disregard, reject, violate, and contradict the nature of absolute, spiritual, ultimate reality. All such dominant, violent, war-waging, religious cultures always embrace a primary, primordial, foundational, essential, dichotomizing, self-other, us-other ontological classification: The other (religiously, individually, socially, culturally, politically, sexually, racially, nationally, etc.) is essentially and ontologically other. The ontologically dichotomized other is then usually regarded by the religious culture as inferior, impure, backward, uncivilized, irrational, immoral, violent, threatening, and evil. This violates Gandhi's ontological view of truth, nonviolence, and religious culture that maintains the essential unity and interconnectedness of all human beings and of ultimate reality.

By way of radical ontological contrast, involving Gandhi's radical ontological paradigm shift. Gandhi maintains that true religious culture that promotes nonviolence and peace not only leads to better means-ends causal results. Such true religious culture is ontologically grounded. It is consistent with and enables us to experience and develop our realization of ultimate reality. Gandhi's ontological perspective upholds the view that what unites me (my religion, culture, social and economic and political group, gender, race, nation, etc.) with the other is more essential than what divides us. This is an essential unity with tolerance and respect for perspectival contextualized differences. In short, only when our true religious culture is ontologically grounded in promoting the structural unity and interconnectedness of nonviolence and peace are we able to experience, relate, and act in ways that reflect the deepest insights into the nature of the ultimate truth and reality and to most develop our moral, religious, and spiritual capacity at the highest level of self-realization.

What this means, as different from some dominant modern nonreligious narratives that promote and justify tolerance, pluralism, diversity, and trying to avoid violence, conflict, and war, is that Gandhi here provides a specifically religious perspective and justification. Based on his radical ontological paradigm with its ontological perspectival shift, Gandhi maintains that religious believers with their religious cultures must oppose violence and war and support nonviolence and peace as expressing the religious views of truth and reality.

As central to this insightful Gandhian approach to violence, nonviolence, war, and peace, I shall refer only very briefly to Gandhi's complex, dynamic, relational, dialectical understanding of the key absolute-relative distinction. In many writings, Gandhi maintains his experience of, faith in, and belief regarding Absolute Truth and Reality

including the absolute perfect ideal Religion (Ethics, Nonviolence, Civilization, Culture, Economics, Politics, *Swaraj*, *Satyagraha*, etc.). Focusing only on these bold passages, many interpreters have regarded Gandhi as an inflexible uncompromising absolutist, who is extolled and at times deified by admirers and devotees as offering us the perfect blueprint of and approach to truth and ultimate reality and who is critiqued and rejected by critics as offering us absolutes that are irrelevant and are obstacles to finding solutions in the contemporary world.

What such admirers and critics often ignore is Gandhi's many writings in which he acknowledges that even he at most has momentary imperfect experiential "glimpses" of Truth, Nonviolence, Ethics, Religion, etc. Additionally, in the overwhelming majority of his writings on the absolute and the relative, Gandhi focuses on our human existential situatedness, our human mode of being in the world, as relative, contextualized, imperfect, spatial, temporal, historical, social, linguistic, psychological, economic, political, cultural, religious beings and how to bring the absolute into dynamic, open-ended relations with our world of relative truth, nonviolence, morality, and religious culture. Thus, for Gandhi, the absolute religious ideals need not be negative forces that are escapist, illusory, untruthful, and ideologically oppressive, violent, and reactionary. Instead, they can serve as experientially based and imaginatively constructed ideals that give us hope, resistance, and a radical paradigm shift with the vision that a far better religious culture of greater nonviolence and peace is possible. In short, Gandhi's focus in the absolute-relative relational and structural dynamic is on how we can move from one relative truth to greater relative truth, from one relative religious culture to greater religious culture, closer to the absolute ideals, minimizing violence and war and maximizing nonviolence and peace as much as is humanly possible.

We shall conclude this formulation of some of Mahatma Gandhi's insights on religion, nonviolence, and peace by noting Gandhi's remarkable hermeneutical moves that make his approach and interpretations far more engaging, challenging, relevant, and insightful. One can easily grant that Gandhi has hundreds of writings that if taken at face value or literally seem embarrassingly naïve, blatantly irrational, completely unscientific, easily refuted by empirical and historical research, and incapable of any factual or objective process of intersubjective verification. Probably best known are Gandhi's many unqualified claims in *Hind Swaraj* that are often cited by anti-Gandhian critics and, in my experiences, are often ignored by critically thinking Gandhi admirers who instead focus on his other writings.[11]

The best illustration of Gandhi's remarkable hermeneutical moves can be seen in his approach to and interpretation of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, his favorite scripture and his daily guide to truthful living, morality, nonviolence, and ultimate reality.[12] Remarkably, Gandhi, upholding his philosophy of *ahimsa*, claims that the Gita is a Gospel of Nonviolence! How is that possible? After all, the textual setting for the Gita is the battlefield, and the two sides are about to engage in violent warfare in which many will die. Lord Krishna as charioteer instructs Arjuna the warrior leader to overcome his doubts about killing and to fulfill his caste duties with renunciation of attachment to results. Arjuna is instructed to act on his self-knowledge that he is a warrior, skilled in killing, that it is his duty to fight, and that the mind–body self-human that may perish is not the real spiritual Soul/Self.

For two thousand years and continuing during Gandhi's lifetime, it rarely if ever occurs to the famous philosophical and religious Hindu interpreters of the Gita or the many millions of Hindu devotees who embrace the Gita as their authoritative scripture that the Gita is a gospel of nonviolence. Gandhi's bizarre interpretation would seem to be a hermeneutical disaster. At the very least, Gandhi's nonviolent interpretation seems to be more of an expression of his personal idiosyncrasies, his moral and theoretical and practical values, his priorities, and not consistent with what the Gita expresses.

In justifying his interpretation of the Gita, as key to his interpretation of religious culture, nonviolence, and peace, Gandhi offers two hermeneutical moves.[13] First, as is often recognized, Gandhi tells us that we cannot take the Gita literally, at face value, as factually describing and endorsing the battlefield, war, killing, etc. That would lead to disastrous

results. Instead, Gandhi instructs us to read and interpret the Gita, with its profound moral and spiritual values and teachings, symbolically, allegorically, and in other nonliteral ways. For example, with no ego attachment to results, our life may be viewed as a battlefield in which it is our duty to fight, destroy, and kill the hatred, greed, possessiveness, immorality, violence, and untruth within all of us and within all religious cultures.

Second, what is almost never recognized by critics and even by admirers is Gandhi's radical hermeneutical move that informs his approach to the Gita and to all other major scriptures and texts. Gandhi repeatedly grants that the Gita's inspired authors, spiritual leaders, political leaders, commentators, and devotees did not regard their scripture as a gospel of nonviolence. As contextually situated, they expressed many profound experiential insights through language, relational values, teachings, and practices that were often literally, overtly, relationally, multidimensionally, and structurally violent. Nevertheless, the Bhagavad-Gita and all other scriptures may be read, interpreted, and appropriated by us, we who are also limited situated human beings, in complex, dynamic, open-ended ways. This was true for the creators and promoters of the Gita over the centuries and is true for us today. In short, we today are capable of reading, rereading, interpreting, reinterpreting, appropriating, and reappropriating the Gita as a gospel of nonviolence for us and for the contemporary world. Gandhi maintains that we can and must do that because that is the most contextually significant, urgently needed, and morally, culturally, socially, spiritually, economically, politically, and environmentally developed interpretation of the Gita for us today. That interpretation of the Gita as a gospel of nonviolence allows us to activate our human potential for realizing true religious culture, free from violence and war, and embracing nonviolence and peace.

7. Concluding Reflections

In this essay on issues regarding religion, war, and peace, we have presented analysis of how religious culture has been an overwhelmingly negative force expressing and promoting violence, hatred, divisiveness, intolerance, war, oppression, domination, and injustice for thousands of years and continuing today. Our formulation of the universal structural paradigm of the sacred and the profane allows us to understand how religious culture can accommodate and give rise to religion as such a negative force inconsistent with furthering nonviolence and peace.

We have also presented analysis of how religious culture need not be such a negative force, and how various religious values, teachings, and practices can resist and attempt to transform religious and nonreligious violence and war. Our formulation of the universal structural paradigm of the sacred and the profane allows us to understand how religious culture can accommodate and give rise to religion as a more positive force expressing and promoting nonviolence, love, compassion, unity and interconnectedness, tolerance and mutual respect, peace, equality, justice, and sustainability. Our extended consideration of some of Mahatma Gandhi's insights suggests ways that religious culture can be a positive force.

It is extremely important to reflect on how and why dominant religious cultures and their dominant religious narratives are such a negative force in our contemporary world regarding issues of war and peace. It is also extremely important to reflect on how the less dominant religious cultures and their narratives can resist and change this so that they become stronger positive forces today regarding issues of war and peace.

In attempting to understand these very complex questions and formulating our most adequate answers, we need to contextualize our formulations and responses. Contextualized religious culture in the contemporary world and in the future is not absolutely dichotomized as essentially or necessarily violent or nonviolent, warlike or peaceful, hateful and cruel or loving and compassionate, divisive and intolerant or unifying and mutually respectful, and so forth. If that is the case, why is religious culture today such an overwhelmingly negative force?

To understand this, we need to contextualize our approaches and interpretations of religious and nonreligious narratives, paradigms, phenomena, values, relations, structures, and practices as they are interconnected with dominant and secondary economic, social, political, cultural, psychological, linguistic, educational, and environmental variables, forces, relations, and structures in our lives and in the contemporary world. In understanding religious culture as such a negative force, we must include the following and more.

We live in a corporate, capitalist, and globalized multidimensional and systemically structured world in which ego-driven greed and attachments are promoted and maximizing profits and the expansion and domination of capital is more powerful than meeting the needs of disadvantaged and marginalized people and the well-being of all; in which the alienation, dehumanization, and anger of the dominated classes, castes, and others is exploited by diversionary demagogues and by the economic, political, and religious institutionalized powerful; in which the short-term imperatives and objectives of the dominant military-industrial complex—expanded as the dominant interconnected military-industrial-consumerist-fossil fuel-nuclear-private war contracting-media-educational, etc. complex—increasingly shape and dominate all areas of life; in which the dominant modern criteria are object-centric, thing-centric, objectified and fetishized and dehumanized, amoral and immoral, violent, oppressive, exploitive, inequitable, and unsustainable with their quantifying assessments of gross domestic product, individual and national and global development, wealth, success, and happiness. Only when we address these and related dominant contextualized forces in our contemporary world can we understand why dominant religious culture is expressed as such a negative force.

It is also important to reflect on how the abovementioned relations between these dominant and secondary contextualized forces and dominant and secondary religious cultures are dynamic, open-ended, complex, contradictory, and dialectically structured and related. Under different contextualized situations, the dominant-secondary relations can be transformed and even reversed. Not only are dominant and subordinate religious cultures shaped by the dominant economic, political, social, and other forces, but religious cultures can become the dominant forces, negatively and positively, causing, conditioning, and justifying other forces in our lives and in the world. For example, many jihadists and other religious warriors and saints and martyrs are willing to die because of their religious culture. Many white supremacists, xenophobic nationalists, patriarchal misogynists, hierarchical caste and ethnic proponents, and even some power elite capitalists and militarists claim that their perspectives are based on their religious faiths, narratives, and cultures.

This open-ended, dynamic, dialectical relation also holds true between the dominant and the less powerful religious cultures in our contemporary world. In much of this essay, we have emphasized dominant religious culture as a negative force promoting and justifying so much violence, conflict, war, divisiveness, and intolerance. Nevertheless, under different contextualized situations, the dominant-secondary relations between religious cultures can be reversed. Contextualized positive religious culture can become the strongest religious force in promoting and justifying a religious paradigm and narrative of nonviolent resistance and transformation, inner and outer peace, love, compassion, kindness, ethical living, multidimensional tolerance and mutual respect, selfless service, social justice, equality, the uplift and well-being of all, and organically interconnected sustainable living enabling human and planetary development and flourishing.

The challenge today for religious and nonreligious cultures, including those that embrace some of Gandhi's insights and other religious and nonreligious insights regarding violence and war, is to envision a radically and qualitatively different paradigm shift, with contextually significant perspectives, values, theoretical constructions, and action-oriented engaged transformative practices that are meaningful, offer hope, and inspire us with alternative nonviolent and peace ways of living. Central to the spirit of this essay has been my conviction that we have the necessary experiences, insights, values, knowledge, and human and other resources to engage cooperatively in desperately needed, more

value-informed, meaningful, more developed levels of existence in the world, including religious cultures promoting nonviolent and peace.

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Notes

1 My major source for the largely undocumented claims about Gandhi's views on violence, nonviolence, war, peace, and religion in this essay is *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Gandhi 1958–1991). In addition to many volumes in *The Collected* Works, I have used several excellent anthologies of Gandhi's writings, including *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* (Iyer 1986–1987) and *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi* (Prabhu and Rao 1967). Documentation of Gandhi's writings is provided in *Gandhi after 9/11: Creative Nonviolence and Sustainability* (Allen 2019) and in other publications. With regard to later sections in this essay, see Chapter 6 "Gandhi's Philosophy: Truth and Nonviolence", (Allen 2011, pp. 105–30) and Chapter 7 "Modern Civilization, Religion and a New Paradigm", (Allen 2011, pp. 131–54), in *Mahatma Gandhi* (2011).

2 For example, we may cite the famous proclamation by the Biblical Prophet Isaiah: "They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Isaiah 2:4).

3 Of Martin Luther King, Jr's many writings on this, the best source is his *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (King 1968), especially King's chapter "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence".

4 "Religion and Violence in the Contemporary World: Is religion more of the problem or the solution?" in Gligor and Sabbarwal (2011, pp. 14–41).

5 The following phenomenological structural model of the sacred and the profane is most informed by my understanding of Mircea Eliade's contributions to the history and the phenomenology of religion. I interacted with and got to know Eliade very well starting in 1966 and especially in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. The controversial Eliade was often characterized as the world's leading interpreter of religious experience, symbolism, and myth. In terms of the following formulations, I describe, interpret, document, and evaluate Eliade scholarly contributions in *Structure and Creativity in Religions: Hermeneutics in Mircea Eliade's Phenomenology and New Directions* (Allen 1978) and in *Myth and Religion in Mircea Eliade* (Allen [1998] 2002).

6 Mircea Eliade's phenomenological model of the sacred and the profane is expressed throughout his scholarly books and other writings, his journals and autobiographical volumes, and his literary publications. I most rely on his formulations in Eliade (1954, 1961, [1949] 1963).

7 It may be helpful to clarify a common misunderstanding regarding "the profane" as expressed throughout the dialectic of the sacred and the profane. From the religious perspective, the profane has a negative meaning and is evaluated negatively since it expresses a human mode of being that ignores or rejects the sacred. Nevertheless, such terms as the Devil and Satan, while evaluated negatively, are sacred and not profane. One finds such terms throughout diverse religious cultures as expressing Supernatural Evil, transcending and qualitatively different form our normal, human, spatial, temporal, historical, limited, profane evil.

8 For example, the influential Hindu philosopher Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan invited Gandhi to contribute an essay for the edited book *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*. Radhakrishnan sent Gandhi three questions: What is your religion? How are you led to it? What is its bearing on your social life? In his one-page "essay", Gandhi sent three brief responses: His religion is Hinduism that includes the best of all religions; he is led to his religion through Truth and Nonviolence and in which Truth is God and other expressions of the truth in all of us; his religion bears on his daily social life, dedication to social service, losing oneself in service to all life, recognizing that all is one. See (Radhakrishnan and Muirhead [1936] 1952, revised edition). Gandhi's letter of 23 January 1935 to Radhakrishnan is published in (Gandhi 1958–1991, vol. 60, pp. 106–7).

9 For example, see Gandhi's 8 December 1931 formulations on this in (Gandhi 1958–1991, vol. 48, p. 404). For a compilation of Gandhi's many writings on this topic, see (Gandhi 1955). In *An Autobiography or the Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Gandhi 1940, p. 505), Gandhi writes: "My uniform experience has convinced me that there is no other God than Truth". For Gandhi's strongest formulation on the integral relationship of nonviolence and truth, as more than "twins" expressing two sides of the same coin, but as inseparable and embedded in each other, as two expressions of the one reality, see (Gandhi 1947) and then published in (Gandhi 1958–1991, vol. 88, p. 283).

10 See the previous note for citations from Gandhi's writings on this significant moral, spiritual, philosophical, epistemological, social, economic, political, cultural, ontological claim.

11 See (Gandhi 1997, edited by Parel). Of the numerous examples in *Hind Swaraj* in which Gandhi's assertions, if taken literally, factually, historically, and at face value, seem bizarre and irrational, we may simply note the following. "Modern Civilization" ("Western Civilization") is equated with Satan and the God of War, whereas "Ancient Civilization" ("Indian Civilization") is equated with the Kingdom of God and the God of Love. Traditional Indian peasants enjoy *swaraj* (freedom, independence), use soul-force, not brute force, are courageous and virtuous, have never been subdued by the sword, and know that nonviolent

satyagraha is the only Indian way to true *swaraj*. See (Gandhi 1997, pp. 5–8, 66–71). In several of my publications, I attempt to analyze how many of Gandhi's formulations can be contextualized and interpreted to express deeper, complex, nonliteral, symbolic, mythic, political, economic, religious, and cultural meanings. In later writings, Gandhi sometimes revises his formulations in more nuanced and more adequate ways. Nevertheless, in our rereading, reinterpretation, and reappropriation of Gandhi, we must reject some of his views as not contributing to the most developed perspectives on religious culture, nonviolence, and peace for the contemporary world.

[12] Gandhi's translations and commentaries on the *Bhagavad-Gita* can be found in various pamphlets and in Gandhi (1958–1991, especially vol. 32, "Discourses on the Gita", pp. 94–376; and vol. 41, "*Anasaktiyoga*", published in English with the title *The Gita according to Gandhi*, pp. 90–133).

[13] I formulate Gandhi's interpretations of the Bhagavad-Gita and these two remarkable hermeneutical moves in considerable detail and with extensive documentation in "How Can Gandhi Interpret His Favorite Bhagavad-Gita as a Gospel of Nonviolence?" in Allen (2019, pp. 60–85).

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