CHAPTER ONE:

Gandhi's view on Religion and the relationship between religion and ethics:

Religion has and had been one of the major source that have guided mankind from historical times. It has greatly influenced all aspects of human life. There are several definitions of religion which imply a relationship not merely between man and some moral power, but also between man and man, that attempts to find out the ways for human perfection. Some of these definitions cited by some philosophers and thinkers are as follows:

Peter Berger defines Religion as the human attitude towards a sacred order that includes within it all being – human or otherwise-i.e., belief in a cosmos, the meaning of which both includes and transcends man.¹

Edward Taylor defined religion as the belief in spiritual Beings.²

¹ The oxford Dictionary of world religions, ed by John Bowker).
² Ibid
James Martineau defined religion as the belief in an ever-living God, that is, a Divine mind and will ruling the universe and holding moral relations with Mankind.¹

To Patric, "Religion is the consciousness of our practical relation to an invisible spiritual order".²

W.T. Stace defines religion as the hunger of the soul for the impossible, the unattainable, the inconceivable.³

Again Hoffoding defines religion as "the conservation of values".⁴

According to Matthew Arnold, "Religion is ethics heightened, enkindled lit up by feeling."⁵

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² A.R. Mohapatra, philosophy of Religion, An approach to world religions, sterling publishers private limited, 1985, p-3.see also patric, G.T.W., Introduction to philosophy. 1.367)
³ W.T. Stace, Time and Eternity, pp.3
⁴ Alexander. Space, Time and Deity, vol-VI,pp.408
Bradley said: “Religion is rather the attempt to express the complete reality of goodness through every aspect of our being”.

Religion is described by Durant Drake in these words: “This disposition of the heart and will, through which man comes to care for the highest things and to live in gentleness and inward calm above the surface aspects and accidents of life, we call, in its inner nature, spirituality; when it is embodied in outward forms and institutions, and spreads among the whole communities, we call it a Religion.”

To Swami Vivekananda, religion is not in doctrines, in dogmas nor in intellectual argumentation; it is being and becoming, it is realisation. Thus religion is the art of living, through right action, how to live our daily life in harmony, within ourselves and with others and to lead a life of peace and happiness.

These and the many other definitions of religion tell us much about religion. Some emphasize the personal, others the social, some the beliefs, others the uses, some the structures, others the functional and so on. Gandhi’s perspective of religion was entirely different from that of others. For him, Religion means a way of life (Dharma). As is evident in his writing,

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8 Ibid, Encyclopedia of Religion

9 Durant Drake, problems of Religion, pp.244.
“you must watch my life, how I live, eat, sit, talk, behave in general. The sum total of all those in me is my religion.” In the past, Dharma was considered as one of the societal values. It is concerned with the man’s practical life. The religious life and the practical (social) life (in Indian thought) could not be separated. Ethical norms and religious norms are not different because they got entangled. What was prescribed by religious code also became moral prescription? That which was prescribed by religion automatically became the norm of social life and that which was the philosophy of practice or action became the background of ethics. He insisted on the praxis of religion. According to Gandhi, the whole gamut of man's activities constitutes an indivisible whole; it must be inspired by one's religious faith, a faith in God, and living in the presence of God, it means faith in a future life in Truth and Ahimsa. In his view, faith itself cannot be proved by extraneous evidence, the safest course is to believe in the moral government of the world and therefore in the supremacy of the moral law, the law of Truth and Love. Praxis of faith thus will be the safest where there is a clear determination summarily to reject all that is contrary to Truth and Love. It is faith that transcends reason. He had an unshakable faith in God. Faith according to him, does not admit of telling.

10 N.K Bose, selections from Gandhi, Navajivan publishing house,1948, pp-254.
It is to be believed and then it becomes self-propagating. He pays greater attention to its moral teaching. He firmly believe that man ought to abide by the laws of morality and that if he does not, it will mean an end to all order in the world and ultimate destruction. For him there is no religion higher than Truth and Righteousness. After a long study and experience he discovers and concludes that all religions are true. All religions have some error in them. All religions are almost as dear to me as one's own close relatives. He too believed that all religions are God-given, and therefore stressed the necessity of Religion. Vows and observances taken in his Religion not only facilitate the spiritual progress of the individual but also harmonious community living on the basis of spirituality, mutual help, and collective salvation. Hence removal of the evils, inequalities, and injustices become part of one's own religious duties.

Gandhi believed that the nature of man is good and it is his nature to know and find God. What distinguishes man from beast's is the ability to discriminate and reason. Progress is man's distinction and not beast's. Man's uses his reason to worship God and to know him, and regards the attainment of that knowledge as the summum bonum of life. To him man is a special creation

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12 N.K. Bose, selections from Gandhi, Navajivan publishing house, 1948, pp-254
of God. But he is special to the extent that he is distinct from the rest of his creation. Man is higher than the brute but that does not placed him to be Himsa with the brute. The brute by nature knows no self-restraint. Man is man in so far as he exercises self-restraint. If man has a divine mission to fulfil then his mission is that of Ahimsa. Without the practise of this mission, complete realisation or God realisation is not possible. Because for Gandhi, the ultimate aim of life is God realisation which in other words mean being aware of ourselves. When one practices Ahimsa with a view to self-realisation, he evolves the ethics of subduing desire, anger, ignorance, malice and other passions. Therefore according to him, conquest of one’s passion is not a superhuman, but human, and observance of Ahimsa is heroism of the highest type with no room therein for cowardice or weakness. For Gandhi, restraint and renunciation is the nature of man. If man do not have in them these two then man will be on different from brute, for man does not live by bread alone, as the brute does.

Gandhi opines that Man by nature is not violent. Ahimsa is the nature of man, or in other words, Man is peaceful by nature. Man as animal is violent, but as spirit is non-violent. The fact that here are so so many men still alive in the world shows that it is based not on the force of arms but on the force of truth or love. Again he argues that if they(man) were instinctively violent, the world would end

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13 M.K Gandhi, In search of the supreme vol I, Navajivan publishing house,1961 p-134.
in no time. They remain peaceful naturally and without any police or other compulsion. It is when the mass mind is unnaturally influenced by wicked men that the mass of mankind commits violence.  

Gandhi believes in the abiding faith in human nature. He refused to suspect human nature. It is bound to respond to any noble and friendly action. He subscribe to the belief and the philosophy that all life is one or that all life in its essence is one and that the humans are working consciously or unconsciously towards the realisation of that identity. Man’s ultimate aim is the realization of God and all his activities, social, political, religious, have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God. The only way to find God is to see Him in His creation and to be one with it. And adds that the ideal must not be lowered because of our weaknesses or imperfection.

No man can live without Religion. For him, Religion is a way of life. By ‘Religion’, here Gandhi does not mean it in the conventional, or customary, or organised or formal religion, we normally take to understand.

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14 Ibid., pp136.
16 selected works of M.K Gandhi, pp-114.
17 M.K. Gandhi, “All life is one”, Harijan, Vol-III, no.15, 1935
Religion, neither for him mean Sectarianism. For him Religion means a belief in the ordered moral government of the universe, a belief which changes one’s very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within. This Religion he believe should pervade every one of our actions. This should be present in every aspect of our lives; whether it be political, social, economic or spiritual lives. As he holds that Religion which takes no account of practical affairs and does not help to solve them is no religion and the most spiritual act is the most practical in the true sense of the term.\textsuperscript{18} Again by Religion, he does not mean Hindu, Muslim, Christain or any other religions. But by Religion, he mean the Religion which transcends Hinduism, Islam, Christianity etc.,. This Religion he meant, seek to harmonizes them and gives them reality.

True Religion for him, is not narrow dogma. He admits that all religions have some error in them\textsuperscript{19}. True Religion also does not mean external observance. Infact Gandhi’s Religion is anything outside the external formalities of religions. Gandhi’s Religion is not confined to the Temples, Churches, books, rituals and other outer forms. His concept of Religion is not bound by any formalities. Man must attain self-realisation which is dependent upon inner rather than outer forces. The ultimate aim of life of man is God realization. God realisation mean nothing but being aware of ourselves. In the very conception of organised religion, we have seen the degradation of Truth and Righteousness in the temples. The great mass or mankind becomes isolated from Truth when religion is made a monopoly by the priesthood and when temples become vested interest. To Gandhi, Truth is too universal to be confined and made Sectarian. The religious Truths is lost the

\textsuperscript{18} N.K Bose, selections from Gandhi, Navajivan trust, 1948, pp-255.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, pp-258.
moment when the disciples of the prophets of religions tries to localise them in priestcraft and temples. Religion then loses its human character and deserves its reputation of being called an ‘opiate’. Therefore he considers temples, Mosques, and churches to be a prostitution of religions.  

To Gandhi, Religion and Morality are inseparably bound up with each other. Morality and Religion goes hand in hand. For him, they are synonymous terms. He sees Religion as Morality. Interdependent of and apart from man’s wishes and opinions, there is something like a moral standard which we may call a Moral law. Moral law need not necessarily be in a written form. Just as we ought to obey laws of the state, it is incumbent for us to obey moral laws. Moral law does not care for the customs or public opinion, if it is not in harmony with the moral law. It cares for the humanity and mankind. Man by nature is moral. It is the moral nature of man by which he rises to good and noble thoughts. As Gandhi holds that man is higher than the brute in his moral instinct and moral institutions. Even a thief, for instance, while stealing knows in his heart that he is doing bad no matter for what reasons he might be doing the act. Moral law is innate. There is a moral sense of right and wrong endowed in each individual right from the beginning. It (moral sense) enables man to know how he should act, regardless of anyone telling how he should act this or that way i.e., there is a sense of ‘oughtness’ in man. Moral law is such a law that in there we not only feel responsible for ourselves,

21 M.K. Gandhi, the selected works of m.g. vol-VI, The voice of Truth, editor. Shriman Narayan, Navajivan Trust, 1968, pp-11
but also feels responsible towards others. It is like we are obliged to others. If a man does some good deeds, he does not do it to win applause, but does it because he must. For him doing good deed is higher kind of food. He opines that a man must do his deed knowing them to be a part of his nature, not for gaining any worldly benefits.

Gandhi argues that the core of all religions is Goodness with wisdom. All religions teach morality. They are based on ethical principles. Religion minus morality cannot exist and again morality cannot be observed without religion. He opines that it is one’s duty to obey the laws of ethics whether or not one professes a religion. Without morality, religion cannot exist. One who observes the law of morality for their own sake and not for any selfish end can be regarded as religious. He holds that desire is of two kinds: one is the pursuit of mere interest. To attempt to fulfil this kind of desire is immoral. The other impels us constantly to improve ourselves and to do good to others. True morality consist in our efforts to realise the perpetual longing to become better and do more good. Gandhi believes in a personal God and he regards God as the impersonal moral law. According to him, the impersonal aspect is the real aspect of divinity. God, to him is the moral law and obedience to such a law is Religion. It would be a mistake on our part to dignify action as religious where they are performed out of a love that springs from fear. Any action done out of fear or by coercion of any kind ceases to be moral (any involuntary action cannot be called moral). A man who does not acknowledge God by name, yet worships Him
through his deeds and obeys His laws recognising in the divine laws, their maker is preferred to the men who believes in the existence of God, yet breaks all His commandments. The first man is to be considered a man of religion and morality. Gandhi preferred to say that Truth is God, rather than God is Truth, because the former proposition expresses a belief that even the atheist share. The belief in the presence of an all-pervading spirit in the universe led Gandhi to a strict formulation of the ethics of non-violence (ahimsa). But gave this age old ethical principle a wealth of meaning so that ahimsa for him became at once a potent means of collective struggle against social and economic injustice, the basis of a decentralized economy and decentralized power structure, and the guiding principle of one’s individual life in relation both to nature and to other persons. The unity of existence, which he called Truth, can be realised through the practise to ahimsa, which requires reducing oneself to Zero and reducing the furthest limit of humility. From the time of Socrates, beauty, Truth and goodness were considered as supreme values of the society. Among these three values, it is truth that attracted Gandhi. He could discover beauty in and through Truth. All truths are not merely true ideas nor ethical values but it is primarily and inevitable connected with human existence. Many a time it is a matter of one's own conscience. People, as a rule, fail to see the beauty in Truth. Whenever men begin to see the beauty in truth, the true art begins. Hence, as Gandhi, one must seek truth; beauty and goodness will then be added.

Gandhi had a great faith in Truth, above all, in the exercise of Truth. He never thought of a failure to one who is truthful and believes in Truth. This means Truth alone triumphs, not falsehood. The divine path to liberation has been laid with Truth, which the seers who have overcome desire tread, and wherein also is the supreme treasure to be gained by truth.' 'For him, "truth alone
triumphs, not untruth" was not a mere maxim but it was a living faith, an inspiring mantra, and words impregnated with power. He holds that Truth is the law of our being which is the fundamental law for liberation. Thus Truth is stable and unchanging. It is nothing but a living embodiment of God. Gandhi also affirms with Jesus the fact that "you shall know the Truth and the Truth will set you free" (Jn. 8:32). The power of Truth leads us to recognize the human dignity, equality, and fraternal solidarity with all human beings irrespective of caste, colour, or creed.

For Gandhi, God alone is Truth and everything else is transitory and illusory. God is without doubt the supporter of truth. Truth always triumphs. God is, even though the whole world denies him; truth stands even if there is no public support, it is self-sustained. Hence Gandhi says: "To me God is truth and love. God is ethics and morality." 22 If we want to understand truth as God, the only inevitable means are love and nonviolence. We may say that Gandhi's religion is the "religion of Truth" as revealed by God.

According to Gandhi, this religion of Truth underlies all genuine religions of the world. All faiths constitute a revelation of Truth. It lends all religions the basic unity they possess. Gandhi has compared this fundamental

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22 M.K Gandhi, Truth is God, Navajivan publishing house, 1955, p-9
religion to a tree with many branches you may say religions are many; as tree, religion is one. Now the question may arise: If God is one and truth is one, how can, and why should, there be many religions? The answer is that for Gandhi, this religion of Truth is an abstract reality and it becomes concrete by taking on specifications like Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, etc. according to the circumstances and needs of the various peoples of the world. It would be greatest misconception if one thinks that Gandhi’s idea of religion and morality is mere theory-based. Gandhi opines that an ethical idea is useless so long as it is not followed by suitable action. There are many who memorise moral percept and preach sermons, but they neither practice them nor they mean to do so. As he holds “Do not preach the God of history, but show Him as He lives today through you”23.

He further goes on to add that he reject any religious doctrine that does not appeal to reason and is in conflict with morality. Gandhi considers rationalist admirable beings so long as they do not claims for its omnipotence. But he plead not for the suppression of reason, but for due recognition of that in man which sanctifies reason24. He holds that all the religions of the world are imperfect and have some error in them. No scriptures of the world can transcends reason and Truth. Any tradition or culture, customs or religion, however ancient, if inconsistent, with morality, is fit to be banished from the land. An error cannot become truth by reason of multiplied propagation, nor truth can become error because nobody sees it.

23 selections from Gandhi, Navajivan publishing house, 1948,pp-259.
He holds that he go by certain fundamental maxims. Truth is superior to everything and he rejects whatever conflicts with it. Similarly that which is in conflict with non-violence should be rejected and also holds that on matters which can be reasoned out, that which conflicts with reason must also be rejected. There are subjects where reason cannot take us far and we have to accept things on faith. Faith then does not contradict reason but transcends it. Faith is a kind of sixth sense which works in cases which are without the purview of reason. Therefore, given these three criteria he has no difficulty in examining all claims made on behalf of religion. Therefore, he holds that intolerance of criticism is not conducive to the growth of public corporate life. There is no room for unintelligence anywhere. Man alone can worship God with knowledge and understanding. Where devotion to God is void of understanding, there can be no true salvation, and without salvation there can be no true happiness.

Realization of God

Man has an insatiable thirst for God. Consequently he feels the urge to realize God, through the means propagated by his religion. Gandhi holds that Man's ultimate aim is the realization of God and all his activities, social, political and religious, have been guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God. To realize God is to see Him in all that lives, that is, to realize our oneness with all creation.

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One can realize God's grace through complete self-surrender and ceaseless communion with Him. He holds that realization is a matter of experience but does not lend itself to description in any language. Man's highest endeavour lies in trying to find God. He cannot be found in temples or idols or places of worship by man's hands nor can He be found in abstinences. God can be found only through love, not earthly but divine. He opines that if he one is to realize God, he has to obey the law of love, the law of ethics.

He believed firmly that man realizes God not in abstract things but in the factory, the home, in schools and colleges, in villages and towns as one lives and begins to move towards the realization of the Absolute. He could visualize this truth as the essential insight of his Religion. The realization is proved not by extraneous evidences but in the transformed conduct and character of those who have felt the presence of God within.