

Gandhi and ‘Lead, Kindly Light’

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In my daily prayers I earnestly pray to God to lead me from untruth to truth. Isn't the same idea conveyed in “Lead kindly Light”?

Gandhi to Vinoba Bhave, 10 March 1947

It is often remarked how quickly John Henry Newman's hymn ‘Lead, kindly Light’ crossed denominational boundaries.¹ The hymn was written as a poem on 16 June 1833 and published in the *British Magazine*, a new Whig journal, the following year. By the end of the nineteenth century ‘Lead, kindly Light’ was included in most English hymnals and many non-English ones as well. Every Congregational hymn book published after 1840 contained it. Horatius Bonar of the Free Church of Scotland introduced it (slightly reworded) into his *Bible Hymn Book* in 1845. American Unitarians included it in *Hymns of the Spirit* in 1864. It was added as an appendix to *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, the popular Anglican hymnal, in 1868. Baptists and Methodists inserted it into their hymnals shortly afterwards.² It also found its way into the *Keswick Hymn-Book* and various revivalist and missionary hymnals.³ By the end of the nineteenth century ‘Lead, kindly

¹ Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England. From Newman to Martineau, 1850-1900*, Princeton, NJ, 1962, p. 86; Canon Duncan, *Popular Hymns. Their Authors and Teaching*, London, p. 132; Gordon Wakefield, *Kindly Light. Meditations on Newman's Poem*, London, 1984, p. xi; Robert Sencourt, *The Life of Newman*, Westminster, 1948, p. 51; Francis Arthur Jones, *Famous Hymns and their Authors*, London, 1995, p. 25; Cecil Northcott, *Hymns in Christian Worship*, London, 1964, p. 77; James Moffatt and Millar Patrick (eds), *Handbook to the Church Hymnary*, London, 1935, pp. 195-96.

² Included in the *Congregational Hymn-Book* (1844), the *New Congregational Hymn-Book* (1859) and the *Congregational Church Hymnal* (1883). Also found in the *Methodist Sunday-School Hymn and Tune Book* (1881), the *Primitive Methodist Hymnal* (1899), the *Methodist Hymn-Book* (1904); the *Church Psalter and Hymn Book* (1864), the *Church Hymnary* (1905).

³ *Judges' Missional Hymnal* (1911), Sankey's *Sacred Songs and Solos*. ‘Lead, kindly Light’, played an important part in the Welsh Revival of 1905.

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Light' had become one of the most famous hymns in the English language.¹

Newman, himself, was somewhat surprised at the hymn's popularity and attributed it to the tune, saying 'It is not the hymn that has gained the popularity, but the tune. The tune is by Dykes, and Dykes was a great master'.² Newman's assessment is only partly true. The Tractarian composer, John Bacchus Dykes' melody 'Lux Benigna', written in August 1865, did add significantly to the hymn's popularity but the words of 'Lead, kindly Light' were popular in Nonconformist churches some twenty years before then when it was sung to Charles Purday's stately hymn-tune 'Sandon'.

Hymnologists and historians have speculated on the reasons for 'Lead, kindly Light's' enormous popularity. John Julian's *Dictionary of Hymnology* acclaims it as one of 'the finest lyrics of the nineteenth century'.³ Eric Routley attributes the hymn's popularity, in part, to the personal character of the hymn and the perplexing circumstances referred therein. 'It is simply a personal prayer of surpassing and haunting beauty which we all want to make our own'.⁴ Owen Chadwick notes that its image of light beyond darkness appealed to the perplexed Victorian mind: 'The Victorian generation found itself in this language. Unsure about the Bible, afraid of Marx and class-war, agonized by evolution and the hostility of nature, hesitant over its moral foundations, struggling with slums and exploitation—later Victorians heard Newman's stanzas, made them their own and voiced their own hesitant act of faith'.⁵ Whatever the reasons for the hymn's success, few people have noted the hymn's connections with India. Neither have they observed how 'Lead, kindly Light' transcended not only denominational and cultural boundaries but also transcended

¹ Ian Ker, *John Henry Newman*, Oxford, 1988, p. 79; E. Routley, *Hymns and Human Life*, London, 1952, pp. 288-89; Owen Chadwick, *The Spirit of the Oxford Movement*, Cambridge, 1990, p. 95.

² John Dahle, *Library of Christian Hymns*, vol. 2, Minneapolis, Minn., 1975, [reprint of the 1927-28 edition] p. 738; Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 25; Chadwick, *op. cit.*, pp. 96-97.

³ John Julian, *A Dictionary of Hymnology, Setting forth the Origin and History of Christian Hymns of all Ages and Nations*, vol. 1, London, 1907, p. 668; see also John Brownlee, *The Hymns and Hymn Writers of the Church Hymnary*, London, 1911, p. 192.

⁴ Routley, *op. cit.*, p. 111; see also Duncan, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

⁵ Owen Chadwick, *Newman*, Oxford, 1983, p. 78.

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religious boundaries to become a powerful influence upon Gandhi's spirituality and his movement for Indian independence.

Though a devout Hindu, the Indian nationalist leader, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948), better known to the world as 'Mahatma' Gandhi, enjoyed singing and listening to Christian hymns.¹ In 1916, Gandhi reminded missionaries at a conference in Madras that he 'yielded to no Christian in the strength of devotion' with which he sang 'Lead, kindly Light' and several other hymns.² Even at the height of the Non-cooperation Movement with the British administration in the early 1920s, Gandhi would reminisce about the tunes and verses of many English hymns and say that they were like *amrit*, the immortal drink from the gods to him.³

To the end of his life Gandhi expressed an interest in Christian hymns. When he was a prisoner in the Aga Khan's Palace in 1943 in Pune he asked Father Bill Lash, the *Acharya* (leader) of an Anglican *ashram*, *Christa Prema Seva Sangha*, to send him a Christian hymnbook.⁴ In the following year, Gandhi wrote to a Quaker friend, Carl Heath that he was in 'the midst of a raging fire' and often hummed to himself the Ira Sankey hymn 'Rock of Ages'.⁵

Numerous Christian hymns are referred to by Gandhi in his letters and addresses. Gandhi delighted in John Bunyan's 'He who would true valour see' and James Lovell's 'Once to every man and nation'. Many revivalist hymns popularized during the Moody and Sankey evangelistic tour of England in the 1870s and 1880s also left their mark on him.⁶ Other favourite hymns included Henry Lyte's 'Abide with me', Isaac Watts' 'When I survey the wondrous Cross', and Frances Havergal's well-known 'Take my life, and let it be'. Yet the hymn that spoke to Gandhi more than any other—and through him, shaped the political fortunes of India—was John

1 Gandhi was strongly influenced by *bhakti* devotionism.

2 M. K. Gandhi, 'Speech on Swadeshi at Missionary Conference, Madras', 14 February, 1916, *Complete Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, New Delhi, [hereafter C.W.], vol. 13, p. 220.

3 M. K. Gandhi, 'To the Learned Narasinhrao', *Navajivan*, 29 December 1920, C.W., vol. 19, p. 178.

4 W. Q. Lash, 'Since 1932', *Reminiscences of Gandhi*, p. 165; cited in Chandran. D. S. Devanesen, *The Making of the Mahatma*, New Delhi, 1969, p. 197.

5 Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi. The Last Phase*, vol. 1, Ahmedabad, 1956-1958, p. 103; see also C. F. Andrews, *Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas*, London, 1929, p. 84.

6 M. K. Gandhi, 'Letter to Esther Faering', 14 March 1920, C.W., vol. 17, p. 89; *idem.*, 'The Mists', *Young India*, 20-4-1921, C.W., vol. 20, p.14; *idem.*, 'Letter to Esther Menon', 6 September 1934, C.W., vol. 58, p. 413.

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Henry Newman's intensely personal hymn, 'Lead, kindly Light'.¹ Gandhi considered Newman's hymn a 'marvellous creation';² it contained, he believed, the 'quintessence of all philosophy'.³

From 1916 until a month before Gandhi's death on 30 January 1948 'Lead, kindly Light' is regularly referred to in Gandhi's writings.⁴ Gandhi daily meditated upon the words of the hymn and he encouraged his supporters to do the same.⁵ He broke fasts with the singing of the hymn. He chastised the press with it.⁶ He quoted it in difficult conversations with the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, during the Civil Disobedience Movement.⁷ He had the hymn translated into Gujarati so that it could be sung at the daily prayer

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- 1 M. K. Gandhi, 'Letter to Gulchen Lumsden', 10 February 1933, *C.W.*, vol. 53, p. 255; Andrews, *op. cit.*, p. 83. See also Margaret Chatterjee, *Gandhi's Religious Thought*, London, 1983, p. 113.
 - 2 M. K. Gandhi, 'Letter to Premabehn Kantak', 1 May 1932, *C.W.*, vol. 49, p. 383.
 - 3 M. K. Gandhi, 'Speech at Wardha', 21 December 1925, *Navajivan*, 27 December 1925, *C.W.*, vol. 29, p. 340.
 - 4 In all, the hymn is explicitly mentioned more than seventy times in Gandhi's *Complete Works*.
 - 5 M. K. Gandhi, 'God Is', *Young India*, 11 October 1928, *C.W.*, vol. 37, p. 350; *idem.*, 'Letter to Prabhavati', 15 December 1930, *C.W.*, vol. 44, p. 386; *idem.*, 'Notes', *Navajivan*, 31 May 1931, *C.W.*, vol. 46, p. 260; *idem.*, 'Letter to Behramji Khambhatta', 21 June 1932, *C.W.*, vol. 50, p. 82; *idem.*, 'Letter to Shards C. Shah', 27 March 1932, *C.W.*, vol. 49, p. 529; *idem.*, 'Fragment of a Letter', 7 January 1947, *C.W.*, vol. 86, p. 320; *idem.*, 'A Letter', 18 November 1947, *C.W.*, vol. 90, p. 61; *idem.*, 'Fragment of a Letter', 23 December 1947, *C.W.*, vol. 90, p. 287. *idem.* 'Letter to Prabhudas Gandhi', 12 November 1928, *C.W.*, vol. 97, p. 86; *idem.*, 'Letter to Hermann Kallenbach', 9 September 1913, *C.W.*, vol. 96, p. 140.
 - 6 M. K. Gandhi, 'Speech at Prayer Meeting', 19 June 1946, *C.W.*, vol. 84, p. 347.
 - 7 'Interview with Viceroy', 27 February 1931, *C.W.*, vol. 45, p. 235.

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meetings.¹ Many letters, articles and speeches of his close with the hymn's distinctive injunction 'one step enough for me'.²

Often the hymn provided Gandhi with the appropriate spiritual and ethical counsel for his movement during times of crises.³ Indeed, Gandhi explicitly stated that the wisdom of 'Lead, kindly Light' applied to organizations as well as individuals.⁴ The cautious reserve of 'Lead, kindly Light' could never compete in popularity with *Vande Matram*, the patriotic song of the nationalist movement, but for Gandhi, at least, Newman's hymn was a more adequate representation of the spirit of his *satyagraha* campaigns. Indeed, Gandhi regarded the words 'one step enough for me' as the motto or guiding *mantra* for all true *satyagrahis*.⁵ Less than a year before his death, Gandhi wrote to his closest and most eminent disciple, Vinoba Bhave, 'In my daily prayers I earnestly pray to God to lead me from untruth to truth. Isn't the same idea conveyed in "Lead kindly Light"?'⁶

Gandhi came to appreciate 'Lead, kindly Light' and several other hymns when he was just a 'youngster'.⁷ Probably, he learnt the hymn when he was a schoolboy at the Alfred High School in Rajkot. Gandhi entered that school at the age of twelve in 1881 and matriculated in 1887. Founded by the British in 1870, the school was named after the Duke of Edinburgh. Its spacious buildings were designed in the Norman-Gothic style. Gymnastics and cricket

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- 1 M. K. Gandhi, 'Letter to Maganlal Gandhi', 14 July 1918, *C.W.*, vol. 14, p. 482; *idem.*, 'Letter to Behramji Khambhatta', 21 June 1932, *C.W.*, vol. 50, p. 83; *idem.*, 'Letter to F. Mary Barr', 16 August 1932, *C.W.*, vol. 50, p. 380; *idem.*, 'Letter to K. M. Munshi', 27 January 1937, *C.W.*, vol. 64, p. 323; *idem.*, 'Speech at Prayer Meeting', 19 June 1946, *C.W.*, vol. 84, p. 347; After an attempt by Vidyagauri and Ramanbhai Mahipatram Nil Kanth to translate Gandhi's favourite hymn, Narasimharo Divetia's Gujarati translation came to be accepted. See Gandhi's 'Letter to Vidyagauri R. Nil Kanth', *C.W.*, vol. 95, p. 17.
 - 2 M. K. Gandhi, 'Statement to "The Island"', [On or before 14 October, 1931], *C.W.*, vol. 48, p. 150; *idem.*, 'Letter to Hermann Kallenbach', 8 April 1915, *C.W.*, vol. 96, p. 209.
 - 3 M. K. Gandhi, 'Letter to Bhagwanji P. Pandya', 18 June 1932, *C.W.*, vol. 50, p. 63; *idem.*, 'Letter to Mirabehn', 14 February 1936, *C.W.*, vol. 62, p. 189.
 - 4 M. K. Gandhi, "'Harijan" in Madras', *Harijan*, 27 October 1933, *C.W.*, vol. 56, p. 145.
 - 5 M. K. Gandhi, 'Letter to Raihana Tyabji', 26 February 1931, *C.W.*, vol. 45, p. 230.
 - 6 M. K. Gandhi, 'Letter to Vinoba Bhave', 10 March 1947, *C.W.*, vol. 87, p. 63.
 - 7 M. K. Gandhi, 'Letter to Gulchen Lumsden', 10 February 1933, *C.W.*, vol. 53, p. 255.

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were compulsory. Lessons and chapel services were in English. Everything, including English hymn singing, was strongly influenced by its British public school traditions.

It is almost certain that Gandhi seriously encountered 'Lead, kindly Light' during his three years as a law student in London from 1888 to 1891. This was the heyday of English preaching when 'pulpit giants' of the ilk of Dean Farrar of Westminster Abbey, Joseph Parker of City Temple, and Charles Spurgeon of the Metropolitan Tabernacle held centre stage. Gandhi heard them all, but it was the rugged and powerful Congregationalist preaching of City Temple's Dr Joseph Parker (1830-1902) that most attracted him. Gandhi attended Parker's Thursday noon services designed for businessmen and shopkeepers during their lunch hour. 'It was his appeal to the thoughts of young men that laid hold of me', Gandhi reported, 'and I went again and again'.¹ At these mid-week services, Parker's continuous exposition of the Bible and exposure to regular hymn singing made their impression on Gandhi's mind.²

The decade and a half following Gandhi's arrival in South Africa in 1893 brought him into closer contact with Nonconformist Christianity. He read the Bible through and studied Parker's massive twenty-five volume commentary on the Bible, *The People's Bible: Discourses upon the Holy Scriptures* (1889); he attended the 'Wellington Convention for the Deepening of the Spiritual Life', a kind of 'South African Keswick' near Cape Town;³ and he was befriended by missionaries from the South African General Mission and Nonconformist clergy in Johannesburg. Margaret Chatterjee in her fine study of *Gandhi's Religious Thought* has shown how impressions absorbed from Christian contacts during this period sank deep into Gandhi's consciousness until, their very source and origin, often forgotten, became part and parcel of his very being.⁴ Later in life Gandhi would remind people of the extent of those Christian associations in South Africa. In 1924, for instance, towards the end of Gandhi's twenty-one day fast in Delhi, the English missionary, C. F. Andrews visited Gandhi after attending a Communion service at St James's Church where that morning Sir Henry Baker's hymn 'I am not worthy, Holy Lord' had been sung. Still reflecting on the hymn when he returned to Gandhi, Andrews

¹ Joseph J. Doke, *M. K. Gandhi: An Indian Patriot in South Africa*, New Delhi, 1967, p. 40; James D. Hunt, *Gandhi and the Nonconformists: Encounters in South Africa*, New Delhi, 1986, p. 17.

² Devanesen, *op. cit.*, p. 195; Hunt, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

³ Hunt, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-33.

⁴ Chatterjee, *op. cit.*, p. 716.

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sang it to him and began to explain the Gospel context of the hymn. But to Andrews's surprise, Gandhi explained how when he first went to South Africa he often attended Christian services in Pretoria and Johannesburg and that he knew Baker's hymn and had fond memories of singing it and many others.¹

One experience of Christian care and welcoming in South Africa which Gandhi especially treasured helped to elevate 'Lead, kindly Light' to its supreme position as the motto of the *satyagraha* movement. On 10 February 1908 Gandhi was brutally assaulted in Johannesburg by Indian Muslims who were convinced that he had betrayed them in a compromise with General Smuts, the Prime Minister of South Africa. He was taken to the home of Joseph Doke (1861-1913) a Baptist clergyman, who, with his wife, nursed Gandhi back to health. Upon arriving at the Doke's home, Gandhi who was unable to speak because of cuts and bruises to his face and mouth, wrote a note to Doke requesting three things. First, he wanted arrangements made so that he could still fulfil an earlier pledge to Smuts that he would sign the Registrar of Asiatics. Second, he wanted a request made to the Attorney-General seeking the release of his attackers. Thirdly, he requested that Doke's daughter, Olive, might sing his favourite English hymn, 'Lead, kindly Light' before he rested.² On several occasions, even twenty or thirty years later, Gandhi would fondly recall this scene of Olive Doke singing 'Lead, kindly Light' in her parents' home.³

The words in Newman's hymn which informed Gandhi's spirituality come in the first stanza:

Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on,
The night is dark and I am far from home,
Lead Thou me on;
Keep Thou my feet, I do not ask to see
The distant scene,—one step enough for me.

¹ M. K. Gandhi, 'Discussion with C. F. Andrews', 15 October, 1924; *C. W.*, vol. 25, p. 231; Andrews, *op. cit.*, pp. 82-83.

² M. K. Gandhi, 'My Reward', *Indian Opinion*, 22-2-1908; *C. W.*, vol. 8, p. 95; M. K. Gandhi, 'Satyagraha in South Africa', 1923-24, *C. W.*, vol. 29, pp. 139-40; Hunt, *op. cit.*, pp. 108-09; M. K. Gandhi, 'Influence of Music', *Young India*, 10-1-1929; *C. W.* vol. 39, p. 90.

³ M. K. Gandhi, 'Letter to Olive Doke', 19 December 1927, *C. W.*, vol. 35, p. 395; *idem.*, 'Influence of Music', *Young India*, 19 January 1929, *C. W.*, vol. 38, p. 90; *idem.*, 'Letter to Verrier Elwin', [27] May 1932, *C. W.*, vol. 49, p. 486.

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The thought that sufficient light was given to take the next step was crucial to Gandhi just as it was for Newman. To speculate about the future, to get bogged down with side-issues, to ask abstract questions, or to reach for knowledge beyond the immediate, in other words, to look several steps ahead or to the end of the path, was not only futile but also self-defeating.¹

Two examples of the way Gandhi drew upon Newman's hymn help to illustrate its importance. First, to Esther Menon, a Danish missionary who left her society in the early 1920s to join Gandhi at Sabarmati and later married an Indian, he counsels:

The impenetrable darkness that surrounds us is not a curse but a blessing. He has given us power to see the steps in front of us and it would be enough if Heavenly Light reveals that step to us. We can then sing with Newman, 'One step enough for me.' And we may be sure from our past experience that the next step will always be in view. In other words, the impenetrable darkness is nothing so impenetrable as we may imagine. But it seems impenetrable when in our impatience we want to look beyond that one step.²

For Gandhi it was just as useless to speculate about the future as it was to brood over the past. Newman's 'One step enough for me' contained the voice of wisdom. The present, not the future, was a call to do one's immediate duty.³

The second example comes from the height of the Non-co-operation Movement. In response to criticism from an American missionary, Samuel Stokes, living in Kotgarh, in the Himalayan foothills, Gandhi wrote an article entitled 'One Step Enough For Me'. Stokes at that time was fearful of the consequences of non-co-operation and was especially concerned about the future of India should the British suddenly withdraw: 'He conjures up before his mind' wrote Gandhi, 'a picture of India invaded by the Afghans from the North-West, plundered by the Gurkhas from the hills. For

¹ M. K. Gandhi, 'Speech at Wardha', 21 December 1925; *Navajivan*, 27 December 1925, *C.W.*, vol. 29, p. 340; M. K. Gandhi, 'Letter to C. F. Andrews', 6 August 1918, *C.W.*, vol. 15, p. 4; M. K. Gandhi, 'A Letter', Before 27 June, 1927, *C.W.*, vol. 34, p. 64; M. K. Gandhi, 'Question Box', *Harijan*, 23 June 1946, *C.W.*, vol. 84, pp. 336-37.

² M. K. Gandhi, 'Letter to Esther Menon', 1 April 1934, *C.W.*, vol. 57, p. 344.

³ M. K. Gandhi, 'A Letter', Before 27 June, 1927, *C.W.*, vol. 34, p. 64; M. K. Gandhi, 'Speech at Wardha', 21 December 1925; *Navajivan*, 27 December 1925, *C.W.*, vol. 29, p. 340.

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me, I say with Cardinal Newman: "I do not ask to see the distant scene; one step enough for me."¹

Gandhi's unswerving trust in God and his commitment to the present is highlighted in both of these examples. He believed that provided his motivation was pure and his action non-violent, then he was not responsible for the manifold consequences that may arise from it.² In response to criticisms of some of the early *satyagraha* campaigns in Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad, Gandhi could respond: 'I fancy that I followed His will and no other and He will lead me "amid the encircling gloom"'.³ Again, in response to Lord Irwin's concern about violence re-erupting during the Civil Disobedience Campaign of the early 1930s, Gandhi offered the observation, which surprised Lord Irwin, that when in doubt he fell back on 'Lead, kindly Light' and 'One step enough for me'.⁴ Likewise, when initiating a campaign of civil disobedience defending India's right to protest against its committal to the Second World War without its consent, Gandhi observed: 'I do not know how things will shape. I myself do not know the next step. I do not know the Government plan. I am a man of faith. My reliance is solely on God. One step enough for me. The next He will make clear to me when the time for it comes'.⁵ During the communal riots in late 1946, Gandhi visited East Bengal where he was confronted by 'darkness all around'.⁶ He trudged from village to village, amidst the despair and destruction, but with a grim determination to keep on, finding a measure of consolation in singing Newman's hymn.⁷

Newman's hymn, I am suggesting, played an important role in bolstering the philosophical underpinnings of Gandhi's *satyagraha*

¹ M. K. Gandhi, 'One Step Enough For Me', *Young India*, 29 December 1920, *C.W.*, vol. 19, p. 73; see also William W. Emilsen, *Violence and Atonement. The Missionary Experiences of Mohandas Gandhi, Samuel Stokes and Verrier Elwin in India before 1935*, Frankfurt am Main, 1994, pp. 171-75.

² M. K. Gandhi, 'One Step Enough For Me', *Young India*, 29 December 1920; *C.W.*, 19. 73; M. K. Gandhi, 'Letter to Raihana Tyabji', 26 February 1931, *C.W.*, vol. 45, p. 230.

³ M. K. Gandhi, 'Letter to C. F. Andrews', 6 August 1918, *C.W.*, vol. 15, p. 4.

⁴ M. K. Gandhi, 'Interview with Viceroy', 27 February 1931, *C.W.*, pp. 234-35.

⁵ M. K. Gandhi, 'Civil Disobedience', *Harijan*, 20 October 1940, *C.W.*, vol. 73, p. 107.

⁶ M. K. Gandhi, 'Letter to Malati Chowdhuri', 20 November 1946, *C.W.*, vol. 86, p. 137; *idem.*, 'Letter to Kundar Dewan', 2 December, 1946, *C.W.*, vol. 86, p. 181.

⁷ M. K. Gandhi, 'Letter to Edmond and Yvonne Privat', 5 February 1947, *C.W.*, vol. 86, pp. 429-30.

movement. The hymn also played a part in Gandhi's developing commitment to religious pluralism. In September 1930 Gandhi made a deliberate change in his attitude to other religions. Before that time, as Jordens has observed, Gandhi had held to the principle of religious tolerance. He had taken the view that the various religions were like rivers that met in the same ocean. After September 1930, Gandhi promoted the principle of equal respect for all religions and adopted the new metaphor for the world religions as branches of the same tree.¹ The change was decisive for Gandhi and was reflected in the Ashram prayer meetings. Though hymns, prayers and readings from all religions had previously been included in the Ashram's *Bhajanavali* (Hymn Book)², early in 1932 'Lead, kindly Light' assumed a special place in the Ashram's prayers. Partly because of a suggestion from Verrier Elwin, an English missionary supporter, who wanted to link his work with that of Gandhi's, and partly because of the hymn's strong associations for Gandhi with the Doke family in South Africa, he introduced into his ashrams the regular singing of 'Lead, kindly Light'.³ From that time onwards, Hindu, Muslim and Christian supporters of Indian independence, would sing 'Lead, kindly Light' either in the English version, or more frequently, in the beautiful Gujarati version 'Premal Jyoti' (Light of Love) every Friday evening, the 'the day of Jesus's crucifixion', as Gandhi explained.⁴ Very soon others outside of India adopted the practice, so that there grew a world-wide fellowship—a 'communion party'—as Gandhi liked to call it, that would help cultivate 'a communion of hearts' throughout the world. The idea was followed with a popular Islamic *bhajan* that was sung on Thursdays. The point of these hymns and prayers from different religions, Gandhi insisted, was to show not merely tolerance but an equal regard for all the religions.⁵ One may feel with some certainty that the writer of 'Lead, kindly Light' would not have approved of the practice.

¹ J. F. T. Jordens, 'Gandhi and Religious Pluralism', in *Modern Indian Responses to Religious Pluralism*, Harold G. Coward (ed.), Albany, 1987, pp. 7-15.

² M. K. Gandhi, 'The Ashram Prayer', *Harijan*, 15 February 1942, *C.W.*, vol. 75, p. 280.

³ M. K. Gandhi, 'Letter to Verrier Elwin', [27] May 1932, *C.W.*, vol. 49, p. 486.

⁴ M. K. Gandhi, 'Letter to Narandas Gandhi', 30 May 1932, *C.W.*, vol. 49, p. 500.

⁵ M. K. Gandhi, 'Letter to F. Mary Barr', 17 September 1934, *C.W.*, vol. 59, p. 18; *idem.*, 'Letter to Narandas Gandhi', 8-13 June, 1932, *C.W.*, vol. 50, p. 34.

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During his lifetime, Newman expressed his concern at the popular usage of 'Lead, kindly light' at funerals. He detested the way that the words of the final stanza were being understood, wrongly, in terms of meeting loved ones after death. He believed that the occasion of a funeral demanded hymns of hope and faith. He would have abhorred the hymn's descent into standard sentimental and musical fare for the twentieth century funeral.¹ Undoubtedly, the Cardinal would have been surprised by the attachment of an Indian nationalist leader to the hymn. Though a passionate fighter for the integrity of the Church, Newman was hardly a prophet of social justice! Perhaps, however, he may have felt that Gandhi had caught what the West had failed to observe : the essential property of the hymn as a prayer to God in the capacity of guide or teacher; and the call of the saint to a dogged trust in God's spirit in advancing towards a glimpsed perfection.

¹ Chadwick, *op. cit.*, p. 97.