

280. TELEGRAM TO REVASHANKAR JHAVERI¹

[On or after *December 23, 1931*]

MORALITY²

BOMBAY

NINE INCLUDING SWISS COUPLE³.

GANDHI

From a photostat: S.N. 18409

281. STATEMENT TO ASSOCIATED PRESS OF AMERICA⁴

[*December 24, 1931*]⁵

I have never been able to reconcile myself to the gaieties of the Christmas season. They have appeared to me to be so inconsistent with the life and teaching of Jesus.

How I wish America could lead the way by devoting the season to a real moral stock-taking and emphasizing consecration to the service of mankind for which Jesus lived and died on the Cross.

From a photostat: S.N. 18411

282. TALK ON BOARD s.s. "PILSNA"⁶

December 25, 1931

I shall tell you how, to an outsider like me, the story of Christ, as told in the New Testament, has struck. My acquaintance with the Bible began nearly forty-five years ago, and that was through the New Testament. I could not then take much

¹ This message is noted along with the message to Vallabhbhai Patel; *vide* the preceding item.

² Telegraphic address of Revashankar Jhaveri at Mani Bhawan

³ Edmond Privat and his wife

⁴ This was given to James Mills.

⁵ From the entry under this date in "Diary, 1931"

⁶ Extracted from Mahadev Desai's report: "The Jesus I Love". The talk was given at 4.30 a.m. Half a dozen persons attended.

interest in the Old Testament, which I had certainly read, if only to fulfil a promise I had made to a friend whom I happened to meet in a hotel. But when I came to the New Testament and the Sermon on the Mount, I began to understand the Christian teaching, and the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount echoed something I had learnt in childhood and something which seemed to be part of my being and which I felt was being acted up to in the daily life around me.

I say it seemed to be acted up to, meaning thereby that it was not necessary for my purpose that they were actually living the life. This teaching was non-retaliation, or non-resistance to evil. Of all the things I read what remained with me for ever was that Jesus came almost to give a new law—though He of course had said He had not come to give a new law, but tack something on to the old Mosaic law. Well, He changed it so that it became a new law—not an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, but to be ready to receive two blows when one was given, and to go two miles when you were asked to go one.

I said to myself, "This is what one learns in one's childhood. Surely this is not Christianity." For, all I had then been given to understand was that to be a Christian was to have a brandy bottle in one hand and beef in the other. The Sermon on the Mount, however, falsified the impression.

As my contact with real Christians, i.e., men living in fear of God, increased, I saw that the Sermon on the Mount was the whole of Christianity for him who wanted to live a Christian life. It is that Sermon which has endeared Jesus to me.

I may say that I have never been interested in a historical Jesus. I should not care if it was proved by someone that the man called Jesus never lived, and that what was narrated in the Gospels was a figment of the writer's imagination. For the Sermon on the Mount would still be true for me.

Reading, therefore, the whole story in that light, it seems to me that Christianity has yet to be lived, unless one says that where there is boundless love and no idea of retaliation whatsoever, it is Christianity that lives. But then it surmounts all boundaries and book-teaching. Then it is something indefinable, not capable of being preached to men, not capable of being transmitted from mouth to mouth, but from heart to heart. But Christianity is not commonly understood in that way.

Somehow, in God's providence, the Bible has been preserved from destruction by the Christians, so-called. The British and Foreign Bible Society has had it translated into many languages.

All that may serve a real purpose in the time to come. Two thousand years in the life of a living faith may be nothing. For though we sang, "All glory to God on high and on the earth be peace," there seems to be today neither glory to God nor peace on earth.

As long as it remains a hunger still unsatisfied, as long as Christ is not yet born, we have to look forward to Him. When real peace is established, we will not need demonstrations, but it will be echoed in our life, not only in individual life, but in corporate life. Then we shall say Christ is born. That to me is the real meaning of the verse we have sung.¹ Then we will not think of a particular day in the year as that of the birth of Christ, but as an ever-recurring event which can be enacted in every life.

And the more I think of fundamental religion, and the more I think of miraculous conceptions of so many teachers who have come down from age to age and clime to clime, the more I see that there is behind them the eternal truth that I have narrated. That needs no label or declaration. It consists in the living of life, never ceasing, ever progressing towards peace.

When, therefore, one wishes "A Happy Christmas" without the meaning behind it, it becomes nothing more than an empty formula. And unless one wishes for peace for all life, one cannot wish for peace for oneself. It is a self-evident axiom, like the axioms of Euclid, that one cannot have peace unless there is in one an intense longing for peace all round. You may certainly experience peace in the midst of strife, but that happens only when to remove strife you destroy your whole life, you crucify yourself.

And so, as the miraculous birth is an eternal event, so is the Cross an eternal event in this stormy life. Therefore, we dare not think of birth without death on the Cross. Living Christ means a living Cross. Without it life is a living death.

Young India, 31-12-1931

283. NOTES

THE LATE IMAM SAHEB

In the death of Imam Saheb Abdul Kadir Bawazeer, I have lost an old friend and co-worker, India has lost a sincere worker and Islam a gem. Who does not know of Imam Saheb's courage.

¹ The proceedings had opened with the singing of a hymn celebrating Christ's Nativity: "While shepherds watched their flocks by night".