

KARL RAHNER'S MEANING OF FREEDOM AND MOHANDAS
GANDHI'S PARADIGM OF FREEDOM STRUGGLE:
A Reading and an Insight into the 'Freedom to Do Good'

Shanthikumar Hettiarachchi

ABSTRACT

This paper explores how Karl Rahner, a systematic Christian theologian, attempted to understand his world in relation to the rest of the realities he encountered in the northern hemisphere. More specifically, he was interested in the theological and dialogical sense of the meaning of freedom in consultation with other streams of thinking and scholarship. Secondly, moving to a totally different world, the attempt is made to investigate how Mohandas Gandhi engaged with the religio-political discourse of his time and managed to combine this with the quest for freedom from the British raj (foreign rule) for his compatriots, who were seeking *Swaraj* (self-rule) in order to liberate both the ruler and the ruled. Both Rahner and Gandhi were profoundly rooted in their own traditions (Freiburg born Christian-Catholic and Gujarat born Hindu-Vaishnavite). This article attempts to meet these two great minds and to understand their different perspectives, which have been unique in the East-West worldview (*Weltanschauung*) and is concurrently significant for the meaning and the quest for freedom in light of the post Covid19 world with its challenging and compelling adjustments. However, in the concluding statement, the author deliberately introduces four other contemporary religio-social movements¹ that highlight the

¹ I intentionally highlight Fetuallah Gülen (*Hizmet/Service*), A. T. Ariyaratne (*Sarvodaya/Shramadana* Awakening of all/donating one's labour for the welfare of others), Tahir ul-Qadri (*Minhaj/Path* in the name of *zakat*) and Oscar Abeyratne (*Pubuduwa/Renewal/commitment* to socio-political wellbeing as being spiritual) as the movement founders in this context of religio-social resurgence in each of their traditions. I have already researched and published on the first 2 movements, (Islamic and Buddhist). See my *Paradigm of Service: The Narratives of the Transnational Hizmet Movement and the Pan-National Sarvodaya Movement of Sri Lanka* in, *The Hizmet Movement and Peace building: Global Cases* (Abu-Nimer, M., and Seidal, T., (ed.), Lexington Books, Maryland, 2018), and the

Hettiarachchi: Freedom 'to do good'

'social responsibility' of each of their traditions in fostering modern movements that seek the freedom to 'do good' for the 'common good' because it is 'good to do good'.

PREAMBLE

Freedom quests in the history of humankind are as intuitively primeval as is humanity itself. The inventions of *fire*, the *wheel* and more recently the *chip* can be categorized as the 'three great leaps' that profoundly and radically changed the course of history. But in spite of these inventions, primordial humans, perhaps like modern human beings, could not find an answer for the puzzling events and apparent riddles of life and nature.

Questions like:

Where were we before we were here?

Where might we be after we are here?

Is this all that there is?

Where are all the dead humans?

Have they gone or are they still around?

Are we to join them or is there nothing hereafter?

Or is there in fact a hereafter?

They perceived most of these questions in relation to the 'powers' beyond their control. This phenomenon led them to engage in a perennial search and articulation of the 'quest' in their own existential situations. Therefore, the quest for 'the unknown' remained a 'mystery' yet to be understood and the explanations were found in many different ways. These explanations were substantially plausible and still continue with certain variables as history moves in different directions especially during a pandemic like the current Covid19 during which beliefs systems are challenged unprecedentedly.

two latter movements (Islamic/ Pakistan and Christian/ Sri Lanka) are being studied currently also as noted in the 'Wrapping up' (conclusion) of this study.

However, those who study their systems could not conclude that they found sufficient meaning in their daily struggles with the game in the jungle, harvest in the field, leisure in the precincts of the cave, company and identity in the tribe, finding harmony with the spirits and placating the gods in their pantheon. Those that began their migration from central Africa into the rest of the land mass indicate different behavioral patterns. Their settlements are a classic example of this perennial quest to know more than they already knew - this inner urge demanded freedom to attempt 'the new'. Freedom, therefore has been one of the most cherished experiences that humankind has grappled with and no doubt it is still the most sought-after yet seemingly unattainable experience despite the enhanced reasoning and the techno-scientific developments of the 21st century.

This article attempts to bring together the material of Rahner's (a systematic theologian and contemplative) *meaning of freedom* and Gandhi's (a Vaishnavite activist contemplative) paradigm of *freedom struggle* for a new insight into the quest for freedom and liberation in the post Covid19 world.

PHENOMENON OF FREEDOM

Freedom is one of the most celebrated notions of the modern world. All religions, political ideologies, pursuits and convictions demand freedom. Karamchand Mohandas Gandhi and Aurubindo Ghosh of the Indian Independence movement, Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Louise Parks of the American Civil Rights movement, and Steve Biko and Nelson Mandela of the Anti-apartheid movement of South Africa come to mind as personalities in the history of freedom movements.

There is remarkable variety in what was understood as freedom by the

above litany and by the six individuals² and their movements mentioned in this article together with the hundreds of thousands of people with quite different ideological aspirations who were inspired by the freedom 'to do good' and who benefitted from the profound insights of these movements for the pursuit of freedom, each in their own circumstances. Clearly, the word freedom means many things to different people.

RAHNER'S ATTEMPT

A German born Jesuit systematic theologian (1904-1984) has a special value for this 'inter-textual cum praxis' piece of research into two epistemological and philosophical traditions. Rahner's major theological contribution could be described as that of the innovative contribution of an erudite and sharp interpreter of Christian doctrine articulated particularly by the church fathers.³ Rahner draws mainly on Augustine and Aquinas (two major systematic thinkers in philosophical theology within the Christian tradition).⁴ It is to his credit that his euro-centric theology was able to open its windows to engage in dialogue with the contemporary world, especially with other traditions and convictions, which were hitherto referred to as 'Orientalism' understood as 'a study of the *exotic other* in the colonial project'.⁵ Rahner was aware of orientalism

2. See my footnote 1 above for these six individuals.

3. This specific group which includes thousands of theologians from all over the Christian world from pre medieval to medieval times from all different cultural and philosophical backgrounds with sound theology but not without controversy over the history of the development Christian doctrine and practice. Their body of knowledge is called patristics (*pater* Lat. = father hence the study of the fathers is called patristics in Christian Studies). This body of knowledge also forms the part of the tradition (*traditione* Lat.) when combined with scripture (*scriptura* Lat.) indicate the two major pillars on which the traditional interpretation of the Christian doctrine relied its ecclesiastical authority.

4. Basically Rahner himself was a philosophical theologian moving between systematic and dogmatic theologies which was his forte, that which made him whom he came into be in the post Vatican II, open to changes and even willing to revise his theology as well.

5. vide E. W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (his *Magnum Opus*), for one of the finest literary critiques of the 20th century. See particularly pp. 1-92, a long description of his versatile but dense reading of history of 'representations', epistemological conflicts which later scholars like Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha and

but admitted that he never travelled to the East during his lifetime. However, his awareness enabled him to expound areas that opened new avenues for his students and for the Vatican II prelates who wanted their church to respond to the challenges of modernity and secularity.

His major works are a classic example of his own philosophically based theological responses as a Christian to numerous issues raised in patristics, existentialism, linguistic analysis, philosophy, evolution, Marxism, atheism and other religious traditions (which he later recognized as important for Christian theology). He was able to respond to the latter even though with an axiom, namely, the concept of 'anonymous Christians' (he is to be credited for this even though it required further revision which he attempted later, though not substantially).

The unsustainable position that he held was to say that Buddhists, Hindus and others might be 'Christians' even though de facto they are unaware of it. I understand it as 'a Rahnerian philosophical assumption' based on Christo-centrism and certain fulfillment theories of doctrinaires such as J. N. Farquhar (Protestant), Jean Danielou, Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar (Catholic). Rahner attempted to rectify his position (unlike the fulfillment theorists), when he was challenged by a Hindu at a public discourse whether he would consider himself as 'an anonymous Hindu, Buddhist or a Taoist.' I am sure Rahner with deep humility found a way to research deeply into religious plurality although he was perhaps not as well informed as his fellow Jesuits such as Jacques Dupuis (1923-2004), a Belgian professor, who spent over three decades in India (*Vidyajyoti*) doing research into *Vedanta* or Aloysius Pieris of Sri

Ranjit Guha joined by many others developed as postcolonial and subaltern studies. Said is considered the 'whistle blower' in this decisive epistemological revolution to a new generation of thinkers of alternative paradigms. See my *Faithing the Native Soil: dilemmas and aspirations of postcolonial Buddhists and Christians in Sri Lanka*, (author publication, Colombo, 2012) on ideas of Said as well as those of Spivak and Bhabha particularly in ch. 7, pp. 190-210.

Lanka (*Tulana*) with his Buddhological insights, each of whom had a deep understanding of their milieu and engaged in theological dialogue with their co-pilgrims.

Rahner commences his quest by considering himself as *rudes*⁶ in the context of the evidence of pluralism in the world. He admits that theology too is fragmented into a whole gamut of particular disciplines, each discipline offering a vast amount of material that mobilizes its own unique and rigorous methodology. He accepts pluralism in theology as a discipline and considers it a healthy sign for "as theologians we must necessarily enter into dialogue with pluralism of historical, sociological and social science, a dialogue no longer mediated by philosophy"⁷ as it may have been during his years as a student.

Through his exposure to plurality, it seems he understood that theology was a discipline and that articles of faith could be preached only to the extent that they succeeded in establishing contact with the total, secular self-understanding which a person has in a particular epoch and succeeds in engaging in conversation that allows itself to be enriched in its use of language and even more so in the very way it engages in theology.⁸ His cautious openness are evident in the Peruvian bishops' attempt to protect Gustavo Gutierrez and liberation theology when Josef Ratzinger, the head of the Vatican's Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF,

6. What he means here (*rudes*) is that he is in a situation like the very first fill the child's tender and unrestricted mind, indicates his humble approach to new learning which meant he had an incomparably magnificent mind.

7. Rahner, K., *Foundations of Christian Faith*, Crossroad, NY, 1994, p. 8. Also see the Back flap of the book where a US based journal, *Theological Studies* produced by the American Jesuits where Rahner's erudition is described, "a brilliant synthesis flowing from an incomparable mastery of Scripture, the Church Fathers, the great medieval theologians, the theology of the Schools, and contemporary thought". I visited this 'theological compendium', which, in my view, is the best I have read by him.

8. *ibid.* The original of course in German translation sounds dense, but what it communicates is deeply theological and profoundly reflective indicating the clarity of mind to elucidate the core of Christian doctrine even though he had little knowledge on the plurality of religions which challenged the 'later Rahner'.

Congregatio pro Doctrina Fidei, Lat.), pressurized the Peruvian bishops to examine Gutierrez's writings.

This was an abortive attempt since the bishops were divided 50% to 50% in the final vote whether or not to issue an interdiction. This event is symbolic of Rahner as a theologian and of his attempt to articulate his conviction that "only by experiencing oneself as a free subject responsible before God and by accepting this responsibility can one understand the direct, not inverse, proportion between radical dependence on God and genuine human autonomy."⁹ Rahner described the 'freedom to do good' in Gutierrez's case as a "faith which is under challenge and is by no means to be taken for granted, a faith which today must ever be won anew and is still in the process of being formed, and he (referring to anyone who engages in theology on freedom) need not to be ashamed of this."¹⁰ He does this with a serenity that permeates his theology with mystagogical interventions¹¹ and that reveals his mysticism, particularly

⁹. *ibid.*, p. 79.

¹⁰. *ibid.*, p. 5.

¹¹. Mystagogy is rooted in the Greek word *myēō*, which means 'to be led into 'the (pagan mystery cult) secrets' or 'to be initiated into the mysteries.' In Rahner's theology, this word *mystology* must be understood as closely connected with the word *mystērion* (mystery), which in turn appears to be derived from *muein*, meaning 'to close one's eyes or lips'. The Absolute Mystery reveals himself in self-communication. In Christian theology and for Rahner, Jesus is both the divine Mystery and the divine mystagogue - the one who initiates into the mysteries so that God's revelation becomes complete in the person of Jesus. However, it does not resolve the Mystery; it increases cognizance of God's incomprehensibility or the ineffability (the question of finality and the definitiveness of Jesus remains a theological issue). Experiences of the mystery of themselves point people to the Absolute Mystery, always indicating an ever greater Mystery. See. *A Mystagogy of Living Faith: An Analysis of Karl Rahner's Mystagogical Approach* in: *Karl Rahner, Culture and Evangelization*, Mellor, A., pp. 116-150. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004400313_005 retrieved on 10 Nov. 2020. In my view, Rahner's position is that, even in heaven, God will still be an incomprehensible mystery. The 'Godness' of God, if fully revealed, would result in God ceasing to be God. Hence, it seems to me that 'incomprehensibility is what makes God who God is'. If God is fully revealed, then God ceases to be God because there is nothing unknown about God anymore. Hence, some call the reality of God a mystery.

Hettiarachchi: Freedom 'to do good'

in his incredibly scholarly work: *Foundations of Christian Faith*, his *Magnum Opus*.¹²

RAHNER'S VIEW ON FREEDOM

Rahner links the freedom 'to do good' with the struggle for and the sense of responsibility. In a very assertive way he engages in a sort of definition, "in real freedom, a subject always intends himself, understands and posits himself and, ultimately, he does not do something, but does himself"¹³ as well as engaging in 'good deeds'. This shows the irrevocable responsibility that is attached to freedom and Rahner further elaborates that freedom is the capacity of the individual to decide about himself or herself in his or her 'single totality'. Because of a person's position in the world, a single action in the depth of person's being is the fruit of many earlier decisions. Therefore, freedom is not the ability to choose arbitrarily and not just a series of independent actions. Freedom is an action definitively geared to the fundamental self-orientation of a person towards the infinite source of goodness and of love and becomes complete by 'doing good'.

Freedom is not simply freedom from some situation or from certain constraints but it is "freedom in and through history and in time and space, and precisely there and precisely in this way it is the freedom of the subject in relation to himself".¹⁴ Freedom is the capacity to do something final and definitive, which is the only self-actualizing process whereby a person comes to be what that person will be forever. Having reached this level of freedom, a person acquires the capacity to change all pre-determined, existential and categorical situations. The strength of Rahner's anthropological and theological axiom is evident in the

¹². See my explanation in footnote 7 above as per this text. Its recommended reading for any serious student of Christian theology as well as those who are engaged in classical Islamic Studies as the latter group might access a good systematized piece of work.

¹³. op. cit., Rahner (1994), p. 94.

¹⁴. ibid., p. 95.

statement that a person becomes part of transcendental freedom through a concrete theological experience, which he describes as the categorical decision of freedom in the here and now. In my view, Rahner is describing the 'here and now freedom to do good' and 'the way into' a profound mystagogical experience.

Rahner states that the world of categorical objectification is the world of transcendental freedom, which consists of the multiplicity of objective experience. He implicitly recognizes the viability and validity of freedom movements but the objectifying process may, understandably, lead the participants of such freedom movements into the same former constraints in new ways. Without doubt, there are examples of freedom movements that have turned out to be autocratic and even repressive which probably Rahner had in mind with his current analysis.

GHANDI AND HIS ATTEMPT

Gandhi, an illustrious son of mother India, was born as a Hindu Vaishnavite. He acquainted himself with the Bible, the Qur'an and the *Bhagavad Gita* and, as a London barrister (1869-1948), met with socialist humanitarians (such as Edward Carpenter), Fabians (such as Bernard Shaw) and Theosophists (such as Annie Beasant) during his several sojourns in London and South Africa. Some of them were rebels who denounced the evils of capitalism, rejected the prevailing values of Victorian institutions, preached a cult of simplicity and stressed the superiority of morals over material values and of cooperation over conflict. These common grounds made them like birds which flocked together in the free social life that London offered to them and to their contemporaries.

His deep spiritual insight into Hindu scriptures and his willingness to cross over to other religious faiths gave him a deeper appreciation of his own tradition. The spirituality of the *Bhagavad Gita* was for him a call to

perform one's own duty, permitting him to act without attachment within the Hindu epistemology. He considered the Gita as his spiritual lexicon. As a practicing barrister in South Africa, he pleaded for the rights of Indian minorities. Moreover, in his home county, the freedom struggle led to his struggle for the radicalization of the concept of *ahimsa* (non-injury to all living beings), which led his countrymen and women into a deeper awareness of freedom. In his autobiography, he writes poignantly, "I should narrate my experiment in my spiritual field which is known only to myself, and from which I have derived such power as I possess, for working in the political field - everything is directed to the same end."¹⁵ His ardent spiritual quest to adopt the teaching of the *Gita* and his sublime aim of *swaraj* (home rule) from British rule appeared to him to be a divine oracle. In his view, he had to pursue truthfulness not only in word but also in thought in order to realize the Truth. One should not only seek the relative truth according to one's own understanding but the absolute truth, which emanates from the eternal principle we call God.¹⁶ He acknowledged that he had not realized this absolute truth and that he was ready to sacrifice everything in the pursuit of it. But he also said: "I am duty bound to pursue and hold onto the relative truth,"¹⁷ which for him was the possession of the land of India for his own people and the freedom in all things for everyone.

THE MEANING OF GANDHI'S FREEDOM STRUGGLE

Even though he was a British trained barrister who had adopted a modern and radical socialist way of thinking and who lived in London, the profound spiritual impact of Hinduism on his life and action made him stand out from others. Unlike many of his compatriots, he did not retire into a cave in the Himalayas or to the solitude of Rishikesh to

¹⁵ See Gandhi, K. M., *An Autobiography: The story of my Experiment with Truth*, (trans.) Mahdeve Devasi. NY, 1957, p. 8.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 9.

contemplate the promptings of the Divine. In fact, he carried the cave within himself during his daily meetings, walks, sittings and conversations with *brahmins* and with *harijans* (whom he called God's people but who were more commonly considered untouchables). For him, freedom was the way to the Truth (*sat*) and the strategy to seek Truth, a quest which could not be limited to the privacy of one's personal life for it had to be upheld in the challenging contexts of social and political life. He considered the creation of a free Indian *Swaraj* (Indian home rule) to be the highest achievement of Truth in the soul of mother India. He admitted without shame that it was not British rule but the imperfections of Indians themselves, which kept their country in bondage.¹⁸ Essential in the quest for Truth was a self-critical agenda that led to self-purification. He strategized his spiritual quest for the freedom struggle by basing his life on the *Gita*. He found a new technique for redressing wrongs by insisting on the devotion to Truth (*Satyagraha*) instead of engaging in conflict. The British administration had no means of handling his willingness to suffer for resisting the adversary without rancor and fighting the enemy without violence.¹⁹ What could the armed police and the so-called 'rule of law' do when thousands of people just stood there without weapons. The line of command froze in Delhi as no state-led rapid deployment was possible in the face of thousands of people on the streets. His contemplative non-action anchored himself in the loftiest Hindu spirit of non-possession (*Aparigraha*), which demanded the willingness to abandon any material things that could cramp the life of the spirit and to free oneself from the bonds of money and property.

Another pillar of his spirituality was equanimity (*Sambhava*), which enabled him to remain unruffled by pain or pleasure, victory or defeat and to work without the hope of success or the fear of failure. What was remarkable in his 'freedom struggle' was the presence of the core of Hindu thought that he brought to light in the practice of non-violence

¹⁸. Devanesan, D. S., *Making of Mahatma*, Bombay, 1969, p. 7.

¹⁹. *ibid.*, p. 94.

(*Ahimsa*), the spirit of non-possession and the objectivity of equanimity (*Sambhava*), which were all essential ingredients in his quest for Truth (*Satyagraha*) and in his struggle for an Indian home rule (*Swaraj*).²⁰ Many people became involved in his expression of non-violence and non-cooperation, which led to the boycotting of legislatures, courts, offices and schools and resulted in the arrests of thousands of people willing to defy laws and cheerfully line up for prison. British rule was shaken to its foundations and London was in crisis because the loss of India meant that much economic profit made in Sri Lanka and Burma would also be lost. The African colonial project would also have to be abandoned because of 'maddening agitations led by a half-naked fakir,' as Churchill frustratingly once said. The real issue was that 'the nudity of the British raj's power game' through its economic gains and repression had finally become exposed to the world. The infamous British East India Company led by Robert Clive with its carefully crafted schemes for commercial gain, fiscal portals and earmarked routes to London were all crumbling before the eyes of the British in the face of robust expressions of freedom. Gandhi and his freedom movement were at the core of this wave of change.

Gandhi's bottom-up constructive program with its religious and political paradigm, which aimed at educating the rural masses (at that time making up 85% of the total population of 900 million in India) and which was intent on fighting untouchability (discrimination against low-caste people), promotion of hand spinning, weaving and other cottage industries to supplement the earning of the underemployed, made him a likable leader but a person who was unacceptable by the Raj. His freedom struggle offered a spirituality for combat and developed political awareness among the Indian masses by creating bonds that broke down traditional barriers of religion and caste. He remains an enigmatic powerful spiritual giant who demands our attention. His life and brutal

²⁰. See *Encyclopaedia of Asian History*, NY, 1988, vs., Gandhi.

death pose persistent questions about the meaning of life and its relationship to the environment and still present challenges to the whole of humanity.

A COMMON SPIRITUALITY

Rahner and Gandhi on the issue of freedom, were on two different religious plateaus. But their responses to the fundamental question of freedom were based on an anthropological axiom to which each kept returning even though Rahner was rooted in Catholic theology and Gandhi was firmly planted in his Vaishnavite school of thought.

Both Rahner and Gandhi agree on the need to actualize freedom as one 'single totality'. Rahner's view is that freedom is a decision involving the whole person. From the depths of one's being, one's total orientation must be directed towards the fuller meaning of freedom (Rahner here is profoundly Kantian).²¹ In my view, Gandhi understands this 'single totality' in his quest for freedom as the 'spiritually integrated core' that energizes political action, which for him is the self-realization of the Rahnerian "subjective freedom in the passage through the temporality which freedom itself establishes in order to be itself."²² Gandhi derives his thought from the Hindu Vaishavite concept of self-realization in the divine, which is still unknown because of ignorance (*maya*). However, the divine Self (*Brahman*) is ontologically present in the soul (*Atman*) where this fuller realization of the eternal soul (*paramatman*) takes place. The

²¹. Interestingly, Rahner names his text as *Foundations of Christian Faith* (1994) 'as if' to follow Kant's *Foundations of Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), because he argued that "we can have knowledge of things we can experience, what he calls as 'categorical experience' and Rahner fully absorbs the Kantian notion of 'experience' as a 'categorical experience', though subjective however, suggesting that moral law is a 'truth of reason' and hence the rational creatures are bound by the same moral law: that they should act rationally in accordance with universal moral law. It's basically suggesting that there is a universal moral truth and that governs but humans must act rationally. Hence, I argue that Rahner was Kantian in his exposition in this specific context.

²². op. cit., Rahner (1994), p. 94.

symbiosis of the 'eternal soul' with the 'self' in potency for the fuller realization (*tatvam asi*/that thou art you)²³ is similar to the notion of 'single totality' in Rahner. It is the final and total absorption that compels the individual soul to become eternal (*paramatman*).

Rahner understands freedom to be the capacity to do something final and definitive. He states clearly: "This freedom is not an individual, empirical datum which *a posteriori* anthropology could permit to exist alongside of other objects"²⁴ Gandhi neither accepted the British notion of freedom for himself nor for India and he basically rejected British rule (foreign rule) as home rule (*swaraj*). Rahner seems to interpret the Gandhian position, namely that people have already experienced what freedom really means when they can begin to ask reflexively about it in order 'to do good'. The Gandhian view is that one realizes the mystical aspect of oneself when one is able to maintain a deep sense of non-injury (*Ahimsa*) to all living beings, the spirit of non-possessiveness (*Aparigraha*) and equanimity (*Sambhava*), which for Rahner exists in the realm of one's present experience (*Sitz im Leben*). Gandhi gave these qualities a geopolitical expression in his devotion to Truth (the *Satyagraha* movement), which for Rahner is the objectification, in time, of transcendental freedom. Gandhi considered such freedom to be his capacity to act definitively for his country and for his people through his experience of life as a Vaishnavite. In my view, there is a profound philosophical compatibility between the thought of Rahner and Gandhi despite the divergence of their *Weltanschauung* (worldviews) regarding many other aspects of life.

In this paper, I have investigated the meaning of freedom for these two intellectual giants, both of whom embraced simplicity as a value. Rather than a comparative study, I have initiated a hermeneutical inquiry, which may be further explored. There is a close affinity between Rahner and his

²³. See *Brahadranyaka Upanishad* for extensive philosophical discussion of this 'union' of the Vedantic tradition, which is part of the *Sruti* (revealed) collection of the Hindu Scriptures.

²⁴. *ibid.*, p. 96.

scholastic theology (although he later tried to free himself from certain aspects of it) and Gandhi's understanding of the philosophy of life as presented in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Their reflections on freedom were rooted in their spiritual traditions. Rahner painstakingly reinterpreted his training in scholastic metaphysics and epistemology while Gandhi carved out a new dimension of the *Gita* and freed it from its purely mythological contours so that it became a readable and practical text for his contemporaries. For Gandhi, it was neither formalism, nor manuals, nor dogmas, nor rituals, nor sectarianism that mattered since the source of life was in religion rather than in politics. So he formulated a most appealing, timely and necessary agenda and outlined an appealing strategy by challenging himself first²⁵ and also his friends and foes to free themselves in order to free the nation from foreign domination. In my view, Rahner explains the Gandhian perception of freedom in the form of metaphysical language as follows: "In the multiplicity of the temporal that we are performing in the event of freedom, we are forming the eternity which we ourselves are becoming,"²⁶ a perfect Gandhian dream of a free India - work now for a better future for all.

I wish that Rahner and Gandhi had met each other in real life. I am curious to know what they might have discussed. The encounter of two persons with such a level of erudition, insight and vision from an earlier period of history has given the present generation vision and direction. Such a meeting of minds would have helped the process of cross fertilization of perspectives for the on-going discourse between East and West and would have shown the way for a 'spiritual quest' in the contemporary world. This is the reason for my attempt to make a study of two great men, whose views some may consider to be incomparable. My purpose was to challenge the common view that such interdisciplinary studies are not possible.

²⁵. 'Experiment on himself'. Gandhi made a costly experiment on himself while seeking the Truth. This is an interesting life-time journey, which many would not dare to attempt.

²⁶. *ibid.*, p. 96.

In the concluding paragraphs I wish to expose the thought of both the Rahner and Gandhi to the light of four religious and social movements with which I have been connected and whose founders are still living.²⁷ I refer to their work in this paper so that younger researchers and scholars might take up the challenge of studying their combination of doctrine and practice in their own context. They appear to us as global nomads, integrating the wisdom of others with their own for the sake of the men and women of our time.

WRAPPING UP

In the past few decades, I have met four 20th century 'movement builders' who share something of the stature of Gandhi. I have had the privilege of studying, documenting and publishing their work substantially. Hence, I would describe Fetullah Gülen of Turkey as a transnational movement builder while A. T. Ariyaratne and Oscar Abyeratne of Sri Lanka and Tahir ul-Qadri of Minhaj-ul-Quran International as originally pan-national founders of movements, which later spread throughout the world by means of each of their diasporas.

My research has been mostly on the Buddhist, Christian and Islamic 'social doctrine' (my research phraseology) that they have interpreted and initiated through their specific reading of each of their religious texts in the contexts of their environment. Each tried to inspire people with the core of their respective traditions 'to be good and to do good and to be of service to others'. They have crossed their national borders and the barriers of Turkey, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. Their many and diverse readers and listeners are spread throughout the world. My intention in

²⁷. I have met all four of them Fetullah Gülen (Turkey), A. T. Ariyaratne (Sri Lanka), Tahir ul-Qadri (Pakistan) and Oscar Abeyratne (Sri Lanka) and I am still connected now with several groups and individuals of all four movements. My learning has been enormously enriched and indeed my perspectives have been greatly expanded. I am most grateful to all four of them. Meeting all four them personally has been unique and extraordinary to me personally as a researcher on contemporary religio-social movements.

this hermeneutical inquiry has been to draw out some salient features from the thought of Rahner and Gandhi and to bring Gülen and Ariyaratne as well as Qadri and Abeyratne into my discussion on freedom.

Gülen and Ariyaratne, Qadri and Abyeratne were inspired by the ‘freedom to do good’ but the implementation of their vision was curtailed by ‘political taboos’ and ‘traditional social totems’, and sometimes jeopardized by political considerations and even by their own traditional religious establishments. Gülen is in self-exile, Ariyaratne and Abyeratne have retired from active work while Qadri travels between Canada and Pakistan. These men and their movements have global implications and, therefore, should be studied seriously so that their movements become known throughout the world. My specific interest is how each of these movements carved out the ‘freedom to do good,’ and this is what each of them is most celebrated and remembered for by the ordinary people in their respective religious traditions.

Tahir ul-Qadri of Pakistan, a spiritual icon and an Islamic scholar has had both national and international appeal due to his philanthropy (*zakat*) and his serious scholarship. I am associated with his work through Minhaj University Lahore. Qadri himself experienced a severe threat to his life, which restricted his freedom. As founders of significant spiritual movements, Gülen, Ariyarante, Qadri and Abeyratne must be given serious attention because their focus is related to issues of the 21st century such as social responsibility, justice and the wellbeing of everyone, irrespective of denominational boundaries.

Just as Rahner and Gandhi devised their paradigm of ‘freedom to do good’ in their own century and in their own context, the *Hizmet* Movement of Gülen and the *Shramadana* movement of Ariyaratne²⁸ and

²⁸. op. cit. See footnote 1 above; also pp. 285-313 of the text for a long analysis on the two movements, dissecting the social doctrine of both Buddhist and Islamic traditions.

Hettiarachchi: Freedom 'to do good'

Minhaj ul-Qur'an International of Qadri are significant models for our reflection. Likewise, Oscar Abeyratne, who is a Catholic priest from the conservative archdiocese of Colombo in Sri Lanka, has made a strong appeal for radical ecclesiastical renewal (*pubuduwa*) and his call has led to significant and effective reforms.

My final suggestion is that young scholars in South Asia look beyond the confines of their own borders to find out what these leading personalities have discovered during their lifetime. In this way, they could be inspired by what these men have presented as possible ways forward in the construction of an alternative society of human relationships based on the invitation 'to be good and to do good.' Let me leave you with the two initial personalities who initially inspired this discussion, namely, Rahner and Gandhi. I am confident that it was a useful exercise to explore the nuances of freedom that each of these pioneers has pursued. The orientation to serve the needs of others is what prompted each of the six personalities mentioned above (Gülen and Qadri, *Islamic*; Rahner and Abeyratne, *Christian*; Gandhi, *Hindu*; and Ariyaratne, *Buddhist*) to move beyond the limitations of the traditional social environments in which they grew up. Although theirs was a 'charisma' and a 'model' of 'unconditional service to humanity', inspired by their different religious traditions, they succeeded in finding the 'freedom to do good' within their respective environments. They searched for the inner core of each of their religious traditions and discovered the 'common social responsibility' present in all religious traditions, namely, the invitation *to be good and to do good simply because it is good to do good*. The founders of these new movements had the same goal but achieved it in different ways. Both Karl Rahner and Mohandas Gandhi are no longer with us but the other four personalities mentioned above continue to inspire and influence world communities. Their wisdom remains iconic to all who seek an opportunity 'to do good' in the current critical circumstances of a major pandemic.