

Gandhi's Religion: Politics, Faith, and Hermeneutics

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ABSTRACT India is widely regarded as an essentially religious society and Gandhi is commonly thought to have been preeminently a man of religion. For some, he was far too saintly to be involved in the life of politics, while others persisted in the view that he was ingenious enough to understand that he could best advance his political interests in a country suffused with the religious spirit if he appeared in the garb of a religious man. What is not disputed is that he lived, so to speak, under the sign of religion. This paper examines the content of Gandhi's religion which has been the subject of numerous inquiries, with a wide spectrum of opinions on his religiosity, his deployment of religious symbols and language, and his adherence to, or departure from, conventional understandings of religion. In the matter of religious belief and conduct, Gandhi was unusually reflective, practical, and wise — all at the same time. He emphasized reason, a need to understanding all faiths, and the freedom of religious conversion. He came to the realization that 'Truth is God' and had an unshakeable conviction that it was not possible to have a religion without politics or a politics without religion.