

EDITORIAL

It is generally said that Islam is a "misunderstood religion". Many factors can be pointed out for this misunderstanding. But the most prominent among them would be its relationship with other religions.

Islam is a missionary religion. Each missionary religion has some unpleasant burden to carry, namely it has to convince its own members as well as those of other religions that "it is the best of all religions in the world." In this endeavour what is usually practised is to bring out the weak points of other religions and glorify its own positive elements.

Muhammad's first encounters were with the poor, illiterate, immoral and belligerent bedouins of Arabia. The primary task of the prophetic mission of Muhammad was to lead back his own people to the belief in and worship of the one true God of Abraham.

Considerable number of Jews and Christians were also present in Arabia at the time of Muhammad. He did not fail to realize the special link that existed between the Arabs, Jews and Christians. Abraham was their common father in faith and they were also recipients of revelations from God. So, these three formed the "People of the Scripture." But on account of the economic greed of the Jews they were hated by the Arabs. Moreover, as the business class of Mecca they rose against Muhammad as soon as he began his ministry in Mecca fearing that his call to monotheism may diminish the importance of Ka'bah which in turn might adversely affect their trade. This economic factor at the earliest stage of contact between Muslims and Jews, perhaps, lies as one of the causes of the later theological conflicts between the two communities.

Muhammad's encounter with the Christians started with a positive note. He appreciated their less money mindedness, piety and service. But he could not accept their most important articles of faith such as the concept of Trinity, divinity of Jesus, salvation through the Christ event, sacredness of Bible etc. This, together with the presence of so many Christian sects, who disputed over the concept of Trinity, divine sonship of Jesus etc. might have prompted Muhammad to deny the cardinal dogmas of Christianity and even the historical fact of Jesus' death on the cross.

The rapid spread of Islam with the use of force into many countries ruled by Christian kings also shocked the Christendom.

Hence, it was but natural that the Christians also held Muslims in contempt, suspicion and enmity which culminated in the abundant use of apologetics and Crusades.

The remarkably positive approach of the Second Vatican Council as epitomized in the Decree *Nosrtra Aetate* is definitely a starting point of new era of dialogue and collaboration between Muslims and Christians. Eventhough some encouraging initiatives are taken by a few Muslims, the general response from the Islamic community is far from satisfactory. The growth of fundamentalism in all religions is making the encounter between Islam and other religions more difficult.

The present issue of the Journal of Dharma is intended to throw some light on the various aspects of Islam's encounter with other religions. We begin this number with the article of Paul Jackson, who tries to depict the encounter between Muslim mystics and Indian religions.

The second article is the text of a speech delivered by Mr Abdulnabi Al Sho'ala at the Centre for the Study of World Religions, Bangalore, on "Islam and the Concept of Tolerance and Co-existence." He tries to give us the often quoted Quranic verses in order to show the positive attitude and approach of Islam towards the members of other faiths.

In the third article "Islam's Encounter with Christianity" James Narithookil has given us a brief history of the encounter between two of the world's largest religions, namely Christianity and Islam.

Prof. Mumtaz Ali Khan has made a genuine and serious attempt to highlight the socio-cultural behavioural dimensions of Islamic ways of life in India, where the Muslims, being a minority community in a predominantly Hindu but secular country, had and have to adopt in order to exist and grow amicably among the members of other religions.

In the last article George Koovackal tries to point out some of the inherent difficulties in Islam as it begins to encounter other religions. One could find two different approaches mentioned in the Quran—positive and negative. Some have the habit of picking up only the positive while others point out only the negative ones. But to get a complete and true picture we have to study both negative and positive aspects. Koovackal has given a slight heavy weightage to the negative verses since the positive ones are often quoted by Muslim writers and many others.

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