

EDITORIAL

Not so long ago, during the Enlightenment era and under the sway of Marxism, there was a wide belief that religion would sooner or later become redundant in the lives of people; science and modern bureaucracy would take care of the concerns of human progress and world peace. Now, surprisingly religions are asserting their presence in politics, economics and culture in no uncertain manner. The twentieth century witnesses a powerful resurgence of the world-religions: Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam. The case of Christianity is not different. International community is increasingly becoming aware of the fact that religion is an indispensable constituent element of the future vision of mankind's peace and progress.

But there is a marked difference in this new perception and awareness. The religions should now play their creative role in their mutuality and interdependence. Otherwise religions will breed fundamentalism and communalism which will nurture only an inhibited identity in the different religious groups. What we experience today is that religions which profess and proclaim the gospel of peace and joy are becoming the agents and instruments of hatred and war.

In the present multi-religious and democratic societies, religions can become sources and agents of peace and prosperity only in a context of a dialogical relationship among them. Formerly religions tried to play their role in the society in an independent and exclusive manner; they maintained a dialectical and polemical approach and perspective among themselves. Now they are pressurized to come together in fellowship and partnership to address the human problems because of the political and cultural challenges of the present epoch. What we discern is a radical shift from dialectics to dialogue and the emphasis is more on co-existence and fellowship. In the emerging global village-culture a religion cannot follow a one-track policy to face the spiritual and social concerns of the mankind. The Vedas and the Bible and the Koran together can only guide and inspire the human community. If any religion follows a lone-path it will be suspected and will be branded fanatic and fundamentalistic. That is to say, now-onwards religions should envision their goals and deliberate their agenda in their fellowship and partnership on a multi-religious platform. It implies that intra-religious dialogue should include the insights of inter-religious dialogue as well.

In other words religious pluralism has decidedly acquired a theological as well as a spiritual status in the coming world order

and world community. Dialogue and fellowship will be the form and fabric of the present and future religious encounters. It points to the fact that today religious pluralism is the very matrix and the inviolable constituent of self-understanding and self-identity of each religion.

Against this backdrop, the theme of the present issue of the *Journal of Dharma* - "Christian Encounter with World Religions," though the question as such is as old as Christianity, embodies a new theological import and urgency. Indeed Christian approach towards non-Christian religions has to embrace a new direction and attain new depths on the face of the challenges of the present epoch. The old models of approach like exclusivism and inclusivism are no more valid and convincing to the modern man's God experience. Even a neutral approach of parallelism - religions as parallel ways of Divine pursuits - does not correspond to the modern sensibilities of mutuality and interdependence. In other words we are all caught up in a paradigm shift. We are in search of new approaches and orientations with regard to our creative encounters between religions. More than any other religions Christianity is critically challenged to address this concern because of its legacy of absolutism and exclusivism in her relationship with non-Christian religions down through the centuries. Now the social and cultural realities force Christians to look at the issue afresh and in a more responsible and realistic way. Even in the West, as the various surveys indicate, Christians are deserting their religions in masses in preference to Eastern religions like Buddhism and Hinduism. The present issue of the *Journal of Dharma* is a search into certain new over-arching frameworks and arenas which can embody the question of Christian encounter with world religions in a comprehensive and in an all-inclusive manner. The old notions of conversions, conquests and expansion are to be replaced by the new alternative concepts of partnership and interdependence in the relationship of Christianity with non-Christian religions.

The authors of various articles are putting forward certain approaches and horizons which may help us to articulate this problem taking account of the ethos and the sensibilities of the present epoch. New paths or approaches are envisaged and new arenas of partnership among religions are identified in these articles. They are not solutions but only directions and orientations to the concern of Christian encounter with World religions.

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