

## EDITORIAL

Religious pluralism seems to be the irreversible law of the society today. All authentic religions are today accepted as legitimate ways of human salvation or liberation to their believers. Religious tolerance, mutual acceptance of all religions, inter-religious dialogue and co-operation for the common cause of justice, peace and harmony are unmistakably the emerging ethos of our age. But paradoxically our period of history is also marked by the phenomenon of the resurgence of religious fundamentalism which is a temptation to fall back into the exclusivism, absolutism and fanaticism of the bygone age. Christian fundamentalistic sects and movements are mushrooming in the western world and spreading all over under the western economic, cultural and political domination. The Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (R.S.S.), the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and similar Hindu movements and organizations are addressing today the Hindu masses often in a very fundamentalistic manner and the popular Hindu responses are more along the same line. The Muslim fundamentalistic movements in Iran and other Arab countries also manifest fanaticism and militancy causing fear and suspicion among other believers. The Sikhs in Punjab follow the suit with fundamentalistic movements and organizations. This is to mention a few conspicuous examples of fundamentalism today.

The scholars of religion and society have to examine carefully and seriously this phenomenon of the resurgence of religious fundamentalism. Could it be just a passing phenomenon in the movement of human history with its ups and downs? Perhaps the liberalist thesis has posited the fundamentalist antithesis which would further lead to a new synthesis? Is it not a strong reaction on the part of the conservatives against the liberal, secular, rational and critical thinking of our time? May be, the contemporary man having lost much of his/her cultural, moral and religious heritage, is in search of a new identity and security which is easily available in the hands of the new fundamentalistic and sectarian movements? Or, is it part of the capitalistic strategy of controlling the socio-economic and political power and maintaining the *status quo* by manipulating the religious sentiments of the masses and thus keeping them divided fighting each other?

In this number of the *Journal of Dharma* we try to describe, analyse and explain some aspects of contemporary religious fundamentalism without any claim to be definitive or exhaustive.

Christian fundamentalism is a very complex phenomenon and is as old as Christianity itself. Rosario Narchison deals with one section of Christian fundamentalism arising out of American Evangelicalism, and in fact many Christian fundamentalistic sects that came out of this common background are spreading all over the world with great missionary fervour and militancy. Their roots are the apocalyptic and biblical expectation of the 'Second Coming of Christ' (*parousia*) and subsequent rule of Christ for a thousand years, the revivalist evangelical tradition with the Puritan ethos, Christian dogmatism, literal inerrancy of the Bible, an avowed battle against Liberal Protestantism, Modernism, Evolutionism, Communism and Socialism, and may be also an unconscious longing for the North American cultural, economic and political supremacy.

Christian fundamentalism in its various American forms and sects may be making a point, argues Colin O'Connell, using Martin Heidegger's philosophical framework. According to Heidegger fundamentalistic thinking is an "epochal fate" "a destiny of thought" itself where "being" uncovers itself, liberating the history of thought from the "Subject-Object" categories. Man, the human subject, shall not be the measuring rode of all reality. The fundamentalistic emphasis on "back to the Bible" has a salvific and liberating element inviting man to listen to God's Word in the Bible behind and beyond the human words therein. The language of the Bible is symbolic having no fixed or determinate meaning, but eliciting always new meanings through which "Being" reveals or uncovers itself. Thus exposing the epistemic and ontological foundations of fundamentalism, the author invites us to look at fundamentalism a little more seriously.

By examining the current fundamentalistic trends and movements in India Stan Lourdasamy would tell us that there is nothing "religious" at all about them, but they are just economic and political manipulations by the ruling Capitalistic class. The craving of the masses today for socio-economic and political restructuring creates a deep crisis which is diverted

with a conspiracy by the ruling Capitalistic groups for their own economic and political power. The masses are indoctrinated and their religious sentiments are inflated making them fight each other and thus channellizing their discontent into forms of communal struggles. Hence what is needed today is not a treatment of the symptoms of communalism and fundamentalism, but the removal of its root causes by the restructuring of our socio-economic and political systems for the benefit of the masses which only could wipe out communalism and fundamentalism from India today.

What is required today is a radical renewal of all religions accepting the positive values from all the sources both from the West and the East. This was indeed the plea of the Hindu reformers of the 19th and early 20th centuries. M. Sivakumara Swamy deals with the Neo-Revivalist Movements in Hinduism led by Brahma Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, Arya Samaj, Theosophical Movement and the Ramakrishna Movement, all of which made a clarion call to purify, abdate and strengthen Hinduism with an openness to learn from all quarters and to live with a healthy pluralism and mutual acceptance of all religions.

Jose Thadavanal makes herein a contribution exposing some of the psychological issues and factors in religious fundamentalism. Today many individuals and groups have lost their identity and security at the erosion of the age-old values, systems, beliefs and religious practices on the onslaught of secularism, modern science and technology. The new fundamentalistic movements and sects are supplying to these people facile identities and security. Could these easily acquired identities and security last for long? Are they the right solution to our agonies and confusions? At this point Dominic George offers an antidote to religious fundamentalism: "a secular spirituality." Secular spirituality is one rooted in the encounter with the day to day realities where one experiences a depth, a mystery (the mystery of God) which evokes in him/her a sense of wonder, surprise, ineffableness or transcendence. The so-called "religious spiritualities" based on formal religions, their belief systems and practices lead to divisions, exclusivism, fundamentalism and fanaticism whereas a secular spirituality will unite all people irrespective of religions, castes and cultures, enabling them to see a mystery at the heart of all realities. We are all seekers and sharers in the mystery of reality which is our common meeting point.

We have raised on the following pages more questions than answers, questions to all our readers to ponder about, to struggle with and to live with. If there be any one answer to the problem of religious fundamentalism it is this : be ready to live with a healthy pluralism and search for unity in plurality.

**Dr. Kuncheria Pathil CMI**  
*Associate Editor*