

EDITORIAL

A Christian theologian, Hans Kueng writes: "My thesis... is: no world peace without peace among religions, no peace among religions without dialogue between religions, and no dialogue between religions without accurate knowledge of one another." It is in this spirit the *Journal of Dharma* has taken up the topic National Religions for its present number.

We often hear of almost a dozen of World Religions. But, in fact, the number of movements and associations that deserve the name of 'religion' is much more higher. In the field of theological thinking the reductionist attitude, that is grouping religions into two major divisions, one's own religion and other religions, is very much operative. One of the pitfalls of this attitude is to fall into exclusivism (one's religion alone is 'the true' religion) or inclusivism (one's religion is 'the best' religion). Although in a sense every religious tradition is unique - namely that there is only one of it and that there is therefore nothing else exactly like it, the claim of 'uniqueness' in the christian theological discourse sometimes appears to be intolerably assertive of the unique definitiveness, absoluteness, normativeness, and superiority of christianity in comparison with other religions of the world. It is certainly of far reaching consequences in the field of interreligious dialogue that the Christian theologians have now come forward to acknowledge that there is something 'mythical' about the claim of 'christian uniqueness.'¹

It is a contemporary religious phenomenon that today more and more Christians, along with peoples of other faiths and ideologies, are experiencing religious pluralism in a new way. A vast vista of the spiritual world of other religions with their vitality, their influence in our modern world, their depths, beauty and attractiveness is now opening before any one who becomes conscious of the religious pluralism of our times. The next step in the development of religious consciousness is the willingness to work out a pluralistic theology of religions, in which each religion will have its own specific contribution. Though at present it appears to be an inchoate and controversial option for any believer, it represents a viable and desirable theological stand. A theological atmosphere in which a theology which justifies the reality of the plurality of religions and their independent validity for salvation will not come

1. Cf. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter, eds. *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness : Toward a Pluralistic Theology*, Orbis Books, 1987.

into being, if the initiatives in this regard are taken by the members of a single religious tradition. Pluralistic theology of religions will become a reality only when, instead of a theologian teaching another, believers in different faiths simultaneously initiate an intensive, sympathetic study of the belief and practices of their co-religionists. This new venture may be regarded as the crossing of a theological Rubicon.

It is not easy to identify the major problems and the most promising directions the pluralistic theology of religions could take. To cross over to pluralism from the shores of exclusivism and inclusivism, among others, the following three perspectives are being adopted by the Christian theologians. 1) Awareness of historical relativity: It means that believers recognize the historical relativity of all religious forms and so abandon their past claims that their religion alone is the "highest" form of religion. 2) Recognition of religious experience as infinite: The core of religious experience being a mystery beyond all forms, it forbids any one religion from having the "only" or "final" word or making itself into an idol. 3) The reality of human sufferings. It implies the admission that no religion can claim that it has always promoted justice, and that it stood against all sufferings of humanity.

Are we to content with a unorganized radical pluralism in the field of interreligious relationship? Or is it possible to evolve a universal theology of religions which would be equally acceptable for believers in any religion or ideologies. The problem itself is not seriously felt and so there is difficulty in clearly articulating this theological project itself. Nonetheless serious researches and discussions are being conducted in this area.² There are, however, authors who believe that religious pluralism will be a permanent feature of our human existence. R. Panikkar writes: "Pluralism does not allow for a universal system. A pluralistic system would be a contradiction in terms. The incommensurability of ultimate systems is unbridgeable. This incompatibility is not a lesser evil . . . but a revelation itself of the nature of reality."

Caught up in the self contradictory theological demands the inter-religious dialogue in the Christian circle, has reached a critical moment in its development. The past attempts of Christians to meet other religions by adopting and adapting their way of worship and life style and theological terminology is also facing stiff opposition. In *Catholic*

2. Cf. Leonard Swindler, *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion*, Orbis Books, 1987.

ashrams (1988) published by Voice of India, New Delhi, we find a graphic account of the way the Christian missionaries meeting Hinduism. "The mission statagists are now making Christianity drop its alien attire and get clothed in Hindu cultural forms. Christianity is being presented as an indigenous faith. Christian theology is being conveyed through categories of Hindu philosophy; Christian worship is being conducted in the manner and with the materials of Hindu *puja*; Christian sacraments sound like Hindu *samskaras*; Christian Churches copy the architecture of Hindu temples; Christian hymns are being set to Hindu music; Christian themes and personalities are being presented in styles of Hindu painting; Christian missionaries dress and live like Hindu *sannyasins*; Christian mission stations look like Hindu *ashrams*. And so on, all aspects of Christian thought, organization and activity are being disguised in Hindu forms. The fulfilment will be when converts to Christianity proclaim with complete confidence that they are Hindu-Christians" (Back flap). Then book raises this very serious questions; "Should not the missionary apparatus be wound up in the interest of justice and fair play?" (p. 94).

The field of interreligious dialogue is now wrought up with difficulties. The present time is neither ripe to settle with a 'pluralistic theology of religion's with a sense of finality, nor to launch out a programme of action to evolve a 'universal theology of religion.' The present number of the Journal is edited with the conviction that we have to spend much more time to study the particularities of different faiths or National Religions before we try to isolate and codify the universal realities of varied religious faiths or ideologies.

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