

EDITORIAL

We live in a world of devotions. However secular the world is, new trends of devotions and devotional expressions are ever on the increase. On the other hand we also have a world of thinking, theologizing and dogmatization. New creeds, manifestos and religious decrees appear day after day. Do they, devotions and dogmas, conflict each other? Dogmas and devotions spring from one and the same foundational religious experience. But they branch and bloom differently. However, their relationship is often overlooked. This happens because devotion is sometimes degraded as sentimental and superfluous in contrast to dogmas which are considered to be rational articulations of a fundamental experience. This seeming dichotomy is a fallacy because true devotion has to be conceived as an act of will which naturally presupposes the intelligence and its incessant search to the Beyond and the Boundless. Sensitivity and emotion do add momentum to devotion, but mere sentimental overflow of feeling is not the basis nor the authentic expression of true devotion. Devotion, although related to a God in visible form, always points to that unfathomable mystery which transcends all sensibility and yet is now transmitted to the devotee in a certain *nāma-rūpa* (name and form) appealing to the total human reality which includes senses, reason and spirit.

True devotion is a higher kind of knowledge which gives devotee the experience of God. Thomas Aquinas understands devotion as a virtue by which a human person is inclined to pay to God the worship to which God is entitled by right. He also conceives devotion as a will to serve and worship God by which the worshippers come to full knowledge of God. Sankara, the *acarya* of Vedanta philosophy, in his minor works praises the greatness of devotion (*bhakti*) and understands *bhakti* as knowledge. Ramanuja, the critic of Sankara, also conceives devotion as the culmination of knowledge. A real devotee is a person of wisdom, faith and devotion (*Bhagavadgītā* : XII. 13-20).

Genuine devotion is a kind of *samadhi* in which the devotee who is an ardent lover of God is united with the Supreme. When a lover of God (*bhakta*/ devotee) reaches the stage of *samadhi* (union with God) he/she attains the vision of God and in that state of immersion in the contemplation of Him and the consequent God-realization, all thoughts

cease and one becomes perfectly silent. This state of consciousness is a religious experience. All acts of devotion like fastings, feasts, festivals, pilgrimages, chanting the scriptures, cult practices, sacraments and sacramentals are to discover the subterranean stream of this experience. Devotions therefore, are expressions of the aspirations of people to be in union with God.

The *telos* towards which religious devotion leads a person is the experiential unity. True devotee will see God in every one of His creation and see everything in Him. The flickering of shadow, rustling of the trees, trickling of waters and the whole material universe is perceived through a deified vision. A devotee of this kind is a man of universal outlook and larger vision. Is language capable of expressing religious experience? In the lives of the true devotees and mystics we see the struggle for articulating their experience of God's presence in the depth of their beings and His presence in the cave of all things. In the struggle of expressing their deep knowledge of God, insights, inner experiences and vision of Infinite spirit-experience, the devotees profusely make use of linguistic structures – metaphors, symbols and images. The language of true devotion and devotion itself should not be degraded as mere sentimental expressions or emotional glow of 'simple religious piety'.

Devotion is something that springs from within which transforms all activities of a human person. It brings one to one's own innermost centre. Devotion is fundamental because its object is Mystery and various devotional forms in religious traditions are for the realization of the Mystery.

Thomas Manninezath, CMI
Editor-in-chief