

EDITORIAL

There is quite frequently a certain dichotomy in man's life, which divides it into spiritual needs and material needs, with religion taking care of the former and other sciences the latter. Often, even world religions like Christianity and Hinduism by their overemphasis on the spirit and a certain neglect of man's physical needs have given rise to the arbitrary opposition between religions and temporal values. However, religion which has to take care of the ultimate concerns of human life should deal with the whole man, both spiritual as well as temporal aspects of his life. In this issue of *Journal of Dharma* we discuss how religion can come to gripe with the temporal or this worldly concerns of man. These papers were presented at an international seminar organized by us to deal with this issue. We have allowed the papers to retain a certain amount of their original tone and tenor of presentation in a live seminar, in order to give a clear idea of the authors' actual confrontation with the issues.

Today the religions of the world faced with the acute problems of widespread poverty, social inequities, and especially the threat of a nuclear war, are becoming aware of the need to face these problems in the light of their own traditional faith and other spiritual resources. The delegates from different religious traditions who met in the World Conference of Religions at Cochin, India, November 15-21, 1981, formulated in their final statement, the basic approach to human problems today as follows:

"We all agreed", they said. "that religion is first and foremost what truly religious people say and do and are. We all agreed that religion must be symbolized externally through the material and social elements of creed, cult and code, yet we are unanimous that its spiritual components were primary". Owing to the inner dynamism of religion and its essential relationship to human society and the world as a whole religion has to adapt itself to the constantly changing signs of the times. It is always linked with the respect for the inalienable dignity and freedom of every human person. Hence religions have to "discover together a new role for religious persons today in the four

vital human areas of the socio-economic, the political, the scientific and the spiritual progress of all men and women.”

When we deal with the relevance and role of religions in resolving the worldly problems of humanity today, there are several important issues that come up for discussion. These issues may be grouped under three heads: the method of approach, the mediatory and prophetic role of religions, and the dimensions of an interreligious spirituality in a religiously pluralistic world.

At a time when the study of religions has secured its rightful place in universities alongside of other academic disciplines, the question of methodology becomes very crucial. Religion has no place in an academic setting if its role is simply to inculcate faith and traditional beliefs and practices. Any academic subject must have a well-defined and rigorous method, and the study of religions must take a critical look at religious texts, traditions, beliefs and practices. This becomes particularly important when religions want to have their say in worldly affairs usually handled by politics, sociology, history and other sciences. These sciences follow a rigorous scientific method that looks for hard facts and objective data and their interrelationships, and they frown upon any further attempts at interpretation as mere editorializing.

On the other hand, there are no cold facts as such: only data interpreted by each science in its own way. Actually the so-called scientific comparative study of religions in the past has been accused of three gross distortions: It has presented Hinduism, Buddhism and other religions as monolithic systems without bringing out the great diversity and radical differences of perspectives within each religious tradition. Besides, there was often an explicit or at least implicit apologetic motive behind the scientific study, to show the superiority of one or other tradition over the others. Finally, when it went on to explain the origin of religions, cults and the like in purely sociological or anthropological terms it easily went beyond the available data. What Max Weber and Durkheim presented were not scientific conclusions but mere speculation. People seriously question the validity of the scientific method which is concerned with the horizontal interrelationship of phenomena to deal with religion which explores the vertical link of the world with a Transcendent Reality.

Dr. Raimundo Panikkar in his introductory paper brings out the complex methodological problems involved in dealing with man's problems on an international plane, as if all problems were the same for all peoples, and that too from the point of view of religion as if religion meant the same thing for all religious people. Representatives of Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism and Chinese and Japanese religions make a simple and unapologetic presentation of how each religious tradition deals with man's material concerns. What comes out from these parallel presentations is that religions face a new challenge today: Their main object of discussion and point of divergence among themselves is not God, but man and his actual needs. This provides a new scope for interaction among religions. In my concluding paper I have shown that actually this has been the central theme for interaction between Hinduism and Christianity in India for the last two hundred years or more. This points the way towards a fruitful collaboration among religions in the modern world.

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