

## EDITORIAL

It has been widely accepted in theory that there is an underlying order in the progression of our lives over the adult years. Though it might be difficult to find many people who believe that adulthood is nothing more than a featureless stretch of years starting with the late teens and ending in the early fifties, the vast majority of the adults either neglect or ignore the developmental phases in their adult life. Much research has been carried out on pre-adult phase and the "depth psychology" founded by Freud spent much of its time and energy on the study of personality development in childhood. Freudians seem to regard adulthood primarily as a scene in which the early unconscious conflicts were re-enacted rather than as a stage of further development. C.G. Jung brought in two different orientations to the Freudian thought. First, he forged a conception of the entire life cycle, giving particular attention to adult development in "the second half of life." Second, he developed a social psychology, giving due importance to social institutions, religion and mythology, in contrast to Freud's clinical orientation which overemphasized psychopathology and internal process.<sup>1</sup>

This recognition of the role of religion and social institutions in the personality development makes it clear that especially in adulthood it has to be conceived as a product of both internal psychological process and exterior cultural forces. Though the exact extent of the influence of social institutions—such as marriage, political systems, ideologies, universities and other educational institutions, communication media which form and alter public opinion, religious beliefs and practices, style of life recognized and approved in a cultural milieu—in the development of personality in its adulthood cannot be easily determined empirically with scientific accuracy, their role in shaping adult personality is a universally accepted fact. It is not enough merely to admit that historical and cultural traditions and social institutions influence the life of the individuals, but one has also to be prepared to accept the undeniable findings of the social scientist, humanists, and the existential and humanist psychologist.

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1. Cf. Daniel J. Levinson, *The Seasons of Man's Life* (New York : Ballantine Books, 1979), p. 2.

The present number of *Journal of Dharma* has chosen the theme "Religion and Human Growth", based on the assumption that religion plays a decisive role in the shaping of an adult personality. Religion in this context meant any ideal that stands as a unifying centre of all the psychic factors and all other powers in a human being. It could also be some of the beliefs and way of life found in any one of the major world religions. Commitment to a noble cause, devotedness, detachment, equanimity in pleasure and pain, universal love, sympathy and fraternity are usually taken to be indicative of religiosity or religious mode of behaviour. Van Kaam defines religious personality as one in which the religious mode of existence is the most central mode of being and which integrates and permeates all ways of being in the world.

The question whether the religious personality is also authentic personality cannot be easily answered one way or other. There is not even a reasonable hope that one could enunciate the characteristics of genuine religious personality and authentic personality in a way acceptable to all parties involved in this search. We are ever becoming more and more conscious of the situation of religious pluralism in the world and the need for interreligious dialogue. All religions in one way or other, discuss the question of the ultimate meaning of reality, the existence and nature of the divine, divine revelation and incarnation, the question of human sin and suffering, and the restoration of the human race to its pristine purity. Since these issues are the object of perennial quest in all religions, no religious tradition can formulate its faith and scheme of daily practice in isolation from other systems and traditions. Referring to this context Chethimattam writes: "Religions should be considered like any other field of human endeavour, say science, technology, art, and philosophy, as parallel efforts of the human race, assisted by Divine Providence to find adequate solutions for the deepest problems of man."<sup>2</sup> The issue being discussed here is, how religion understood in this sense is related to human growth.

As in the case of religion, in the case of determining the characteristic features of authentic personality also there is no single norm.

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2. Zacharias p. Thundy, et al (eds.), *Religions in Dialogue: East and West Meet*, (New York: University Press of America, 1984), p. 297.

Humanist psychologist Abraham H. Maslow describes a genuine personality as a self-actualizing person. Bastin Parangimalil in his research into Maslow's thought sheds much light on this issue. Although the exploration of the highest reaches of human nature and its ultimate possibilities and aspirations is a difficult and tortuous task, the concept of self-actualizing people who have attained a high level of maturation, health and self-fulfilment, seems to give a working definition of an authentic personality.

My own article on Personality Development and Mature Religion is an attempt to show that authentic religious personality can be hardly opposed to anything that is genuinely human or anything that is defined as a characteristic feature of authentic personality. Prof. Peter Slater's article introduces the whole theme of this issue of the *Journal* arguing that the real human existence is religious existence. Any violence to man's nature is irreligious and so a healthy way to live is to create an atmosphere of "nonviolent dialogal we feeling", writes Prof. Rolf von Eckartsberg. Swami Nirmalananda's Zen-experience is a personal invitation to see whether religion fulfils the higher human needs. One thing is sure, religious beliefs should not come in the way of realizing one's worthy personal and social goals. Hence R. Ponnu, through his case study on Vaikunda Swami, shows how religion helps a man to be a better man in his social life. The article of Prof. Edward L. Murray takes the position 'that religion is essential for the full integration of the human person'.

The exploration leading into the depths of one's soul, and all endeavours to put together the potentialities of a person into an integrating whole would not make much sense or could not be held together unless a person in normal circumstances is supported by a faith community. The grave need of estranged, alienated and rootless persons today is for a sensible and historical relationship of fidelity and trust with a supporting community of faith or religion. By reference to it one seems to find a focal point for the programme of development of one's personality.

**Thomas Kadankavil**  
*Editor-in-Chief*