

EDITORIAL

A religion embodies a system of values. Whether values can be distinguished as religious and secular is a moot question which is being discussed by the growing humanistic trend in philosophy. As the secularization process gathers momentum, the traditional distinction between "sacred" and "profane" is gradually disappearing. Yet the validity of the claims of religions as regards completeness and totality of the eternal essences they hold, and the universal aspect of their representations, seem to be issues indicative of non-religious or secular values. Moreover, the radical changes that occur from time to time in our political, economic, social, and cultural life in turn affect our value system call into question the meaning and usefulness of our traditional and religious values.

The possibility of the continued existence of values is not, however questioned. Value is the quality of anything that renders it desirable or worthy of esteem. Man will always have options for holding something dear, either in the realm of moral excellence, or in the materialistic sphere. Hence the present number of *Journal of Dharma* takes up the issue whether we can find an area of value which is not specifically religious but closely related to spiritual values.

When what is valuable is conceived in terms of what is desirable or what will fulfil one's needs, the area of choice and operation becomes as wide as the human interests themselves. One who seeks pleasure and joy may look for these in emotional excitement or in some more sober experience such as in the enjoyment of art, music or drama. When the intellectual need is pre-dominant, the values one may seek would lie in freedom of opinion and freedom of expression; in a spiritually oriented person, the most overpowering need may be to seek to discover the ultimate meaning of his life or to find something to which he can commit himself totally. Here the primary value could be peace and joy of the human heart.

The spiritual and secular values intrude into each other's areas so that most of the secular values become spiritual as well. The system of values one consciously or unconsciously adopts is conditioned by the world-view that controls this value-orientation. When one views the world as something unknown and unknowable in which self is at the centre, the values that one seeks would be survival, security, sources of wonder and pleasure. If the world one lives in proves to be a problem place, the need

of conquering it by work to achieve self-competence, self-worth and a feeling of belonging to someone or somewhere could constitute the central values for the person. The world can also be taken up by some as a project, to be analysed and developed. In that case the virtues that would be important for the person would be independence, fairness towards all, service and creativity. For those persons who regard the world as a mystery to be approached reverentially, the desire for harmony, interdependence, intimacy of relationships and understanding the world in a more integrated and holistic fashion would form the core values.

Cultural and political aspects play a major role in determining the evolution of the values which would govern secular life. These may even compel one to accept a way of life that is questionable. Thus in our social system, although things like bribery, corruption, nepotism, adulteration, smuggling and hoarding are condemned as social evils, many do lightly condone them and offer an array of excuses to justify them and to put an end to the qualms of one's conscience. For instance, we live with the mistaken view that manual work is degrading. This fallacy emanated from the caste-system in the society. We tend to forget that the caste-system initially was meant to preserve the skills of labour inherited traditionally by different labour groups of people in the society. But later it became so inflexible that it blocked completely mobility from one group to another and this resulted in some classes of people despising certain forms of work. To take an example from Western society, the one-parent family is now being accepted as a socially and morally permissible way of life. The philosophy underlying this, which is a half-truth, seems to be that it is better for children to live with one parent in peace and harmony than to live with both parents who are constantly clashing because of lack of compatibility. This is an easy and dangerous way out of a difficult situation. Thus values are becoming more and more socially and culturally conditioned.

There are other values too besides religious values, that is, values with regard to simply being either holy or sinful. Yet most of the values, namely, economic (utility for human purposes), aesthetic (beautiful-ugly; noble-vulgar), hedonic (pleasant-unpleasant), ethical (such as cleanliness, diligence, honesty, dutifulness, patience, understanding through dialogue, brotherhood etc.) and philosophical (meaning, and unifying point in life; search for an Absolute) values are closely related to religious values. The essays in this number of *Journal of Dharma* deal mostly with these borderline values lying between philosophy and religion.

The concept of representations as mirroring eternal essences (the sacred) irremediably separates method from content. Religious studies, however, usually get over this separation by using the analogical structure of microcosm and macrocosm, where the individual is seen to mirror the structure of the cosmos. This artificial Western conceptual framework has become the unquestioned universalistic methodology in the Western academic tradition. Dr. T. J. Chösang through a critical study of Mahayana Buddhism of the Tibetan Kadampa tradition shows that at least that tradition must necessarily escape the kind of universalistic method based on systems of representations. The central issue implied in this search is the question of discovering a 'microcosm' which would be a unifying centre of everything. This is certainly a non-religious value; but it is a value that emerges out of man's need to have a more integrated and holistic vision of himself.

The term 'Absolute', with all its connotations in Western philosophy, represents a value which seeks the convergence of the multiplicity of realities in a terminal point. Dr. Ruben L.F. Habito in his article examines how far this concept can be related to the notion of *dharmakaya* in the absolutist Buddhist tradition. The search for a meaning in life is a search for a centre that unifies the life and activities of a person. Dr. Cassian R. Agera makes an attempt to discuss the vital problem of meaning in life and the relation it bears to religion. The article 'Counter-Balance to Scientific Rationality in Education' focuses its attention on those higher values, not of course necessarily religious values, which are conspicuously absent from the present-day educational system. The authors of this article argue that the students will not realize the need for the behavioural restraints of the spiritual dimension without the recognition of some transcendent values.

Transcendent values evolve from basic values such as honesty, truthfulness, kindness, friendship, self-discipline and the like. Normally, man responds with high moral virtues when faced with a big enough challenge such as the problem of finding a purpose or a unifying centre in life and thought. It may not necessarily be a religious value, but it will certainly be a value, that could motivate a man to bring out the best in him. But that is also religiously important.

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