

## EDIOTRIAL

"If people are asked to choose between tradition and progress, tradition would perhaps be their instinctive choice, although a second thought might induce them to take a few hesitating steps in the direction of change." This is the conclusion drawn by S.C. Dube from his study of the Indian villages.<sup>1</sup> Tradition stands for religion. The fundamental drive in the thought and activities of the village group "seems to be towards the goal of adjustment of the individual to the universe." Several aspects of man's life are predestined and he has to reconcile himself to these. Still, what is predestined he can modify through his actions, and particularly determine the course of his life after death. But most of the changes in social structures and institutions are actually brought about through non-religious mundane factors that create social interaction in which pressures are felt, advantages perceived and responsibilities recognized.<sup>2</sup> Among these pressures are state compulsion, legal prescription, material culture and technology, utility, convenience, availability and price of goods.<sup>3</sup> Religion seems to stand often as a stumbling-block, preventing real healthy social change.

But often the progress and change in social structures and institutions achieved by a sort of revolt against religion seem to place a lopsided emphasis on the material aspect of human life and lead only to an increase of conflicts, rivalries and clashes between individual and individual, class and class, nation and nation. Matter is what divides, spirit alone can unify. As Sri Aurobindo Ghosh often pointed out, if society is to achieve healthy and lasting change, man must be moved from his innermost depths through spiritual motivation. In history radical and lasting changes of human society were initiated by religious leaders like the Buddha, Confucius, Jesus Christ and Mohammed. Religion alone can help achieve the development of the whole man and of the whole human society.

The reason for this paradox of religion, which should be the dynamic principle of human progress often being an obstacle to

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1. S. C. Dube, *Indian Village* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1967), p. 235.
  2. See Raymond Firth, *Elements of Social Organization* (London: 1951), p. 85.
  3. See S. C. Dube, *Indian Village*, pp. 230-32.

healthy social change, may be the two types of religion that are involved in the social life of people. As Henry Bergson has pointed out in his *Two Sources of Religion and Morality*, there is a closed type of religion that dampens all enthusiasm, kills all originality and creativity and seeks only to keep all individuals under the iron control of tradition; and there is an open religion that makes people free to follow the path of experience and achieve the authenticity of intuitive realization. The religion that supports the day-to-day social life of most people adheres to certain basic contrasts of right and wrong, just and unjust, pure and impure, sinful and meritorious and the like. As Srinivas notes about the village life of Rampura, close to Mysore, it is not possible in the daily existence of the villagers to draw a clear line between the social and the religious.<sup>4</sup> Even though gods and goddesses are propitiated with complex festivals and rites, "the villagers viewed their relations with deities in much the same way as they viewed their relations with each other." While the theologians conceived God as immanent, having knowledge of past, present and future, ineffable, etc., the villager dealt with Him as he dealt with his powerful patron or his trader, smith, barber, washerman or potter. He bargained with the deity, taunted him, and when the deity failed to grant a favour the man and his family shifted their allegiance from a traditional to a new deity.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, what is needed for authentic social change is the open religion that gives people courage to raise their eyes from the immediate material needs and selfish individual interests and to be creative in their lives reaching out to others. What is called for is not mere physical courage that often leads to violence and easily degenerates into brutality, but the courage of the spirit that enables people to come out of their individual isolation and relate to other people. As Rollo May says, in human beings courage is necessary to make being and becoming possible. Nature and being are identical in plants and animals. But a man or woman becomes fully human only by his or her choices and his or her commitment to them, and these decisions require courage. Even on the physical level it calls for a use of the body not for the development of musclemen, but for the cultivation of sensitivity, the capacity to listen

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4. M. N. Srinivas. *The Remembered Village* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1976), pp. 313.

5. *Ibid.* pp. 319-29.

with the body, a view of the body that is today emerging into world consciousness through the influence of yoga, meditation, Zen Buddhism and other religious psychologies. On the spiritual and social level it is the courage to relate to other human beings, the capacity to risk one's self in the hope of achieving meaningful intimacy. An intimacy that begins and remains on the physical level tends to become unauthentic. Authentic social courage requires intimacy on the many levels of personality simultaneously.<sup>6</sup>

Paul Tillich has noted the different ways in which different religions have endeavoured to integrate persons and communities through the dynamics of faith flowing out into love: "In the great commandment of the Old Testament, confirmed by Jesus, the object of ultimate concern, and the object of unconditional love, is God. From this is derived the love of what is God's, represented by both the neighbor and oneself. . . In Hinduism and Buddhism it is the faith in the ultimate One, from whom every being comes and to which it strives to return, that determines the participation in the other one. The consciousness of the ultimate identity in the One makes identification with all beings possible and necessary." But religions tend to deteriorate and separate faith and love: Judaism became a system or ritual laws. Indian religions easily fell into magical sacramentalism.<sup>7</sup> Roman Catholicism endeavoured to unite the most divergent elements of man's religious and cultural life, Old Testament, Hellenic mystery religions, individual mysticism, classical Greek humanism, the scientific methods of later antiquity and, above all, the New Testament synthesis of ethical and mystical elements. But it excluded prophetic self-criticism by authoritarian church, and exaggerated sacramentalism over moral and personal elements thus obstructing all change and growth. Protestantism which arose emphasizing the prophetic and personal elements ended up with a moral type of ultimate concern losing in the process sacramentalism and the unifying authority.<sup>8</sup> Hence society has to be always vigilant to keep religion the dynamic force for change and growth it is expected to be.

6. Rollo May, *The Courage to Create* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975), pp. 4-9.

7. Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper Torch Books, 1958), pp. 112-113.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 71-72.

This issue of the *Journal of Dharma* discusses the complex relationship between religion and social change. The basic patterns of this ambiguous relationship are shown. As Dr Rita H. Mataragnon demonstrates in her research paper, even in a very religious country like Philippines there is a vast difference between the God of the rich and the God of the poor. Perhaps what is most fundamental may be the religious psychology that evolves into sociology and is in turn shaped by society itself. In Japanese Shinto religion and social reality can hardly be distinguished. But in India the deepest religiosity has co-existed for centuries with widespread corruption and anti-social attitudes. One can legitimately ask whether it is in spite of religion or rather on account of the type of religion followed by the people. The scope of the papers presented here is not to make an exhaustive study of the problem and to propose clear cut solutions but rather to bring out the complexities involved in the relationship between religion and social change and also indicate the great possibilities for improvement both for religion and for society.

**John B. Chethimattam cmi**  
*Associate Editor*