

EDITORIAL

All forms of popular religions have some sort of sacraments and rituals. Christianity, which seeks to speak of religious reality with more theological precision, makes a distinction between the Sacrament and Sacramental, the former being understood as a visible means or channel that mediates inner grace and the latter as a ritual having the force or efficacy of a sacrament. The Christian tradition speaks of seven sacraments, liturgical enactment of the Eucharistic sacrifice, and a number of other rituals symbolically presented, interpreted and understood.

Hinduism is also replete with sacramentals (*Samskaras*). The whole pilgrimage of a human life from womb to tomb is punctuated with *Samskaras* (holy rites). At all the auspicious stages of human life, they have holy rites. Some of them are just superstitions and popular, motivated by unquestioned faith; others are priestly and cultural. They are all born out of human beings desire to improve upon their nature. The popular goals of these rites were the removal of hostile influences, attraction of favourable forces, and the gain of material goods, such as cattle, progeny, long life, wealth, prosperity, strength and domestic felicity. These rites were also performed to express ones own joys, felicitations and even the success of various activities of one's life. As regards their cultural and religious purposes Manu declares: "The bodily *Samskaras* of the twice-born sanctify this life as well as the other" (*Manu* 2:26). By performing them one gets social privileges and rights. It is a passport for admission to Aryan community and sacred literature. Gautama mentions eight qualities the soul could attain through their performance, namely, mercy forbearance, freedom from envy, purity, calmness, right behaviour and freedom from greed and covetousness. Thus by making the *Samskaras* compulsory, the Hindu sociologists aimed at evolving a type of humanity uniform in culture and character and having the same ideal in life. Through the practice of them the recipient realizes that the whole life, properly understood, is a sacrament, and every physical action should be referred to and connected with the spiritual reality. Sacrifices and rituals were the only way through which an active life in the world is reconciled with the spiritual realization.

The practice of religion cannot be conceived independently of its influence on tradition. A philosophy of worship surmises that the rhythm of God goes along with life and that the worship cannot be confined only to the present as life itself cannot emerge solely from the present. The tension and polarizations of the old and the new, the past and the present is a reality in the area of sacraments and rituals. A number of people seek to live outside the historical dimension, or the influence of tradition and run after modernity and complain that they find life meaningless. A life in a religious tradition is likened to a life in a family. Members of a family like to do things the way they were done by their grandfather and great-grandfather, repeating even their mistakes. This can be understood only as an act of love. The remembrance of the family tradition keeps love going. But this love needs also to be constantly enriched by new life. This is also the case with the worship of God and growing in his love through the practice of sacraments and rituals if there is to be an ever-renewing present reality of an old story. The human spirit has to liberate itself from the blind repetition of the institution of the sacraments and rituals.

Speaking from the context of Hinduism, we can say that in the beginning every one performed the religious ceremonies in their own way. Then the intellectual classification of these ceremonies set in. This marked the end of the creative period. In the third period of development the main business was to collect and preserve. In this spirit, even a slight variation from the fixed course of the ritual action was a sin. Everything had to be done according to the rules laid down in the religious tradition. These stages of development can be found in the growth of all the world religions. At the third stage the true spirit of the rituals, in a sense, departed and they ceased to be refined, elevated and adapted to the specific needs of the time. This situation called for renewal, adaptation and change. The present number of the *Journal of Dharma* takes up this religious phenomenon.

No attempt, however, is made to analyse and discuss any particular sacrament or sacramental and their rituals in any religion. The main aim of the articles is to deal with the sacramentality of certain elements in a religious tradition. All forms of rules and regulations are restrictive, but Paul Puthanangady paradoxically highlights the liberative power of the rituals. Rabbi Allen S. Maller brings out the idea that the prayer-book, the Siddur, is a record of Israel's self

revelation to God as well as the spiritual history of the Jewish people. The sacramentality of Krishna-Avatara, according to Daniel P. Sheridan, consists in the fact that the divinity dwells in the hearts of all his created beings the way fire resides in wood. John Navone's article on *Lex Narrandi* gives an extended meaning to the narration of the institution of the Eucharist and his novel idea of "Story Theology" makes the understanding of the Christian dogmas of Incarnation and Eucharist better. Philip Thuruthimattam offers a comparative study of the discipline of fasting in Christian and Hindu religious traditions.

The religious reality of prayer, the incarnation of divinity, the recital of the faith of a community, the ritualistic enactment of the sacrifice, the practice of fasting and other sacramental disciplines have a double dimension, namely, a restrictive and a liberative one. But from the very outset the reader is called upon to be aware of the liberative forces of rituals in a special way.

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