

## EDITORIAL

As life itself is often conceived as a journey towards maturity, growth into the maturity of faith or religion also is a journey. It is a struggle each person has to undertake for himself, though in the process, one could turn out to be a helper in the religious education of his co-religionist. In this task of learning and teaching there is a radical particularity, namely, one can learn and teach that religion best in which one has been brought up from his childhood. The desire to take up the profession of teaching in general could spring either from a personal urge to share one's knowledge with the younger and less informed members of his generation, or from the not so noble motive of seeking a livelihood. Education itself, however, is considered in the final analysis as a process of reaching out for transcendence, and an expression of that human quest. In this basic sense all good education can also be called religious.

In a more specific sense religious education is an attempt to impart the knowledge of a religion primarily to its own believers and secondarily, to any one interested in it. At present we can identify three levels at which this imparting of religious knowledge takes place, namely, (1) Catechesis, in the exclusive environment of house or temple (2) Scientific study in the secular institutions and (3) the popular movement in society. A fourth level can be the comparative study of religion in specialist academic circles. The catechesis has its counterpart in the adult life in popular religious movements in society and the scientific study of religion in the educational institutions and this might, extend and take the form of comparative study of religion among scholars.

For any comparative study, a thorough understanding of all the aspects of the religions compared is required. The question whether a scientific study of religion by an outsider of the faith would, in fact, succeed in revealing the depth of experience of a believer born and brought up in that faith is still a matter of debate, meanwhile, modern studies in religions do what they can within these limitations. The way of learning and experiencing by doing or following different spiritual paths found in various religions was open only to some rare souls like Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836-1886) in India. According to

Ramakrishna one of the basic limitations of the Sacred Scriptures and their scientific study is that they remain at the level of notions and they never help one to reach the level of actual experience. "The almanac forecasts the rainfall of the year. But not a drop of water will you get by squeezing the almanac." Such is the case with pondering the Scriptures for God-experience. The historians of Ramakrishna record that after having experienced God as present in various forms of Hinduism he wanted to experience God as a living reality in other religious traditions as well. In 1866 a Muslim wise man initiated him into the Muslim way of worship and he was thus brought to the experience of Allah. He also had the opportunity to be initiated into the Christian form of worship by one of his friends in 1874. His Christian *sādhana* is said to have led him to a personal encounter with Christ. Whatever had been his other forms of religious experience, he considered the devotion to *Kāli* as supreme. He declares: "No matter where my mind wandered, it would come back to the Divine Mother."

This openness to all forms of religious experience led him to formulate a philosophy based on it. He took up the philosophical position that "God can be realized through all religions. All religions are true. The important thing is to reach the roof... God is one, but His names are many." A scientific student of religion may dismiss the claims of Ramakrishna as purely subjective and mystical. One who looks at religions from the standpoint of the believers in that religion would reject Ramakrishna's claim as empty and of no consequence. Hence what he has experienced in his experiments with religions cannot be accepted without reservation as the goal of religious education. Nor are we sure whether this can be set as a conscious goal in the process of imparting and imbibing religious instruction.

Religions themselves are to grow. It is common knowledge that we are witnessing a knowledge explosion encompassing all aspects of life including the religious. It is essential that religions themselves of necessity offer something new to their followers. It is by contact with other spiritual sources that one's own religious experience gets enriched. Motivated by a desire to grow deeper in one's own religious being and also influenced by the spirit of interreligious dialogue the interest in religious education in all its forms and at all levels is on the increase today.

As one becomes increasingly acquainted with other religions one's attitude towards them undergoes a change. Ignorance of other religions breeds intolerance, gives rise to a feeling of superiority of one's own religion and a lack of openness to them. But as one's interests in other religions grows, a psychological process of an attitudinal change towards them begins. A glance at the history of the nations of the world shows the varied forms and degrees of intolerance the religion of the ruling class adopted towards the followers of 'alien religions'. Death, exile, torture, persecution, restriction, slavery, discrimination, taxation, ban on public practice and teaching were some of the forms of external expression of this religious intolerance. These are some of the forms of fear that any genuinely religious man should overcome.

When people of different religions are destined to live in the same geographical area, as in India, they are forced to accommodate and accept each other. Living in physical proximity with believers in other religions will naturally lead a person to inquire and learn more and more about the religions of the others, encounter him and thus be prepared to co-exist and co-operate with him. This may soften his attitude towards others, lead to dialogue with them and a modification of his own position to one of co-operation, if not partial merger and progressive synthesis. No claim is made here that this would necessarily happen in a multi-religious context. I have only indicated a possible and desirable line of development and change. Even those who live in a religiously homogeneous atmosphere have to be aware of the need for developing a dialogical attitude in their inter-religious relationships. In the hope of making a small contribution in this direction the *Journal of Dharma* takes up 'Religious Education' as its theme for this number.

Most of the articles in this number are factual statements of what is being done in the field of religious education. All educators in this field must have a clear picture of the students and a true concept of self-identity as they come into the field of religious education. A university by its very *raison d'être* committed to truth. Peter Slater offers some philosophical reflections on this fact with reference to Religion and Religious Studies. While W. Ower Cole explains the legal position of religious education in the schools in England and Wales, Varlaxmi Pateria and A.K. Pateria deal with the same issue in the context of 'Secularism' in India. Lawrence E. Frizzell's article is a biblio

graphical survey—an essay on Jewish education. An empirical study is made in the article of Arvind Sharma on the impact of academic study of religion on inter-religious preferences among the university students in Australia. Purushottama Bilimoria presents Gandhi's vision of education as the means to total liberation of man from ignorance. The article of Rabbi Asher Finkel is on Maimonides' life of religious learning. The survey of the religious education programmes in the Indian (Christian) university colleges prepared by Pushparajan actually complements the other articles on the Indian context of Religious Studies.

The task of a religious educator is to help the believer to live in the past, the present and the future. That means he has to be a pilgrim in time. The story of success or failure of millions of religious men in their struggle to communicate their religious ideals cannot go, we hope, without producing their own ripples in the sea of human values.

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