

EDITORIAL

Traditional topics in the comparative study of religion seem to recede in to the background as more and more writers choose to contribute on subjects which earlier did not exist or were only borderline issues. That the indubitably religious themes such as liberation, *moksha*, God, sin, man and redemption, grace, sacraments and rituals no longer enthuse the scholars as much as the peripheral or borderline issues is no indication that the interest in religious studies is steadily on the decline. Though the awareness that there are other areas as vital and significant as the traditional ones waiting to be explored for a better understanding of one's own religion is a new phenomenon, it has to be regarded as a boon in the field of the humanistic study of religions. One such area is religious pluralism. Religions exhibit a strong urge for asserting their uniqueness as well as universality, along their claim to the title of the true religion. When one is wholly involved in oneself any counter claim made by an outsider would be regarded as a hostile gesture. But if one makes an honest attempt to examine human religiosity from the point of view of the religion of the other, he would immediately be struck by fact of religious pluralism. The new theological problem it gives rise to is that each of these religions appears to be an existential possibility offered to every person. Hence the study of the ways in which the world religions have reacted and are reacting to the challenge of pluralism can truly become a fertile topic in the comparative study of religion.

Another relatively new topic in this field of studies is the problem of 'mission' and 'dialogue'. It is traditionally believed that the mark of a true believer is that he is imbued with the spirit of proclaiming his belief as the only way of salvation open to the 'outsiders' of his faith. This attitude has undergone a qualitative change with the recognition of the fact of religious pluralism. Now the discussion has shifted from 'mission' to 'interreligious dialogue', a non-existent issue a couple of decades ago. The present number of *Journal of Dharma* takes up some of these marginal topics to highlight their importance in the field of modern religious studies.

John Grimes in his article on 'Religion and Modern Studies' examines the common attitude of a believer in the context of religious pluralism, which has made everyone a spiritual neighbour of everyone else. The problem we confront in this context is the attitude of an 'exclusive we' of a believing community over against the attitude of 'the other', that is those outside one's fold of faith. The solution to this problem is not mere co-existence or tolerance. The article attempts to show how varying and even conflicting perspectives can be understood and appreciated within a context which is meaningful. If huma-

nity is to survive, it can do so only by accepting the facts of diversity and pluralism. Formidable consequences threaten to follow if the diversity and pluralism are approached with an attitude of 'we' and 'they'. Neither the 'primitive approach' ('survival of the fittest') nor the 'permissive approach' (eclecticism) can be a satisfactory solution. The goal may have to be a deeper spiritual intuition of the 'one', behind the various forms of man's multi-religiosity.

The article of Dharam Singh concentrates on enlightenment and activism in Sikh ethics. Though the issue under discussion does not expressly have an interreligious dimension, it brings out the universal and integral character of Sikh religion. Using the four-cornered reasoning of the Madhyamika Buddhism of Nagarjuna, as interpreted by the Kadampa tradition T.J. Chösang argues that an attempt is to be made to counteract all forms of feminihilism—any suppression of feminine or masculine powers in favour of the other—so that the issue of the discrimination against women in religious tradition may be squarely met in this era of religious equality.

Formerly, the birth of God was a significant religious issue. Now the death of God is receiving equal importance in the humanistic study of religion. The expression 'Death of God' has a 'religious' and 'secular' meaning: the former accepts it as a real necessary fact and the latter rejects it as a myth or a pseudo-problem. Prof Kamuya-wa-Kang'ethe treats this problem in its various ramifications in the context of the African religion of a tribe. The African idea of God, that is, the idea of the Ngai of the Agikuyu of Keneya, never dies. It is the God imported from Europe, 'the dead God in Jesus Christ' that is dying in Africa.

The desire and struggle to discover and retain an identity is found not only in the biological instinct of the living beings, but even in man's higher instincts such as the religious and the spiritual. Joseph Pathrapankal, analysing a biblical text (John 12:20-26) shows that Jesus' mission was not confined to the Jews alone and that it involved a self-transcending identity, a notion not so popular in religious literature.

Modern linguistic sciences, especially semantics and hermeneutics, the issue of inculturation of religions and indigenous theologies, are all widening the field of study of religions. The chances are that as we progress, earnest students of religion will ever bring up new areas and issues for deeper study to sustain man's everlasting interest in religions.

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