

## EDITORIAL

The New York Times of January 26, 1983 carried on its front page pictures and news items of Pope John Paul II signing the revised code of Canon Law and President Ronald Reagan giving his State of the Union speech. The setting seems to suggest equal importance to both. This indicates the great significance religion, even organized religion, has gained today in the public eye. Gone are the days when religion was fully segregated from public affairs and relegated to the purely private sector, classed with those things which consenting adults can do in the privacy of their homes or churches, a matter of personal taste and choice. With this increase in public prestige and importance, religions are called upon to give convincing rational justification for their faith. In most universities, especially in the West, religious studies form an independent department alongside of physics, history, mathematics, biology, psychology and other scientific subjects in the school of arts and sciences. Hence arises the crucial question as to how far the rigorous demands of scientific methodology can be applied to religious studies, and what support the empirical sciences can give to religion to help it satisfy the requirement of public accountability.

What is common between the sciences and religious studies is the systematic approach of their differing methodologies to their respective fields of study, the effort to formulate their findings in propositions or statements, and the possibility of critically testing and verifying those statements. Here the first consideration is the nature of rationality as it is used in the empirical sciences and in the examination of religions. Often religion was considered more a matter of faith than reason while science was reputed to be the rational and critical examination of the data of experience reproduced under controlled conditions. But religious faith itself is not blind belief but the rational acceptance of the deeper meaning of human existence located in the divine source and the ground of all things. For it to be fully human it has to be a rational service rendered to the Transcendent, a deliberate and reasonable acceptance by reason of what is beyond it because the divine appeals to it as its ultimate good. This rational criticism of what is accepted by faith depends greatly on social sciences like history, sociology, psychology and anthropology. For, the Good for man is not anything purely abstract or impersonal but concretely situated in the course of events in history, in the context of the human community, helping the growth and development of the human individual in his personal

encounter with other human beings and the supreme personality or transpersonality of the divinity.

The study of religions has followed mainly four different patterns in the past. First of all there is the partisan, apologetic study of each religion instituted by its faithful followers to defend its traditional tenets against all attacks from the outside and to explain them and make them intelligible and acceptable to the members as well as to outsiders as the best approach to the Divine. This approach restricts the sphere of reasoning and relies more on the infallible wisdom of tradition. Then there are the great system builders like Hegel, Schopenhauer and Bergson who follow independent grand schemes to define what religion should be and then proceed to judge the relative merits of particular religious traditions. But this passion for system building often ends up in pure abstractions which lack relevance to the actual experience of human life. At the other end of the spectrum are sociologists and anthropologists like Max Weber, Emile Durkheim and Bronislaw Malinowski who regard religions a purely human phenomena and try to explain them as sociological, cultural and anthropological structures of human life. Every science is restricted by its own methodology and hence is bound to reduce all available data to its own categories and to provide a full explanation for them. But the co-existence of several scientific disciplines side by side in the same university today has made all reductionism suspect. Today no single science has the privileged position of being recognized THE science, more exact than the others. Hence reducing religion to mere sociology or psychology or history will be scientifically unacceptable. The only acceptable method, therefore, will be to judge religions as constituting a unique field that requires its own critical method like any other systematic study. Religions like philosophies refuse to be satisfied with explaining human events merely by the horizontal interrelationship of factors on an equal footing, whether they be psychological, sociological, economic or cultural. For religion, the ultimate meaning and value of human experience has to be rooted in the awesome and fascinating mystery of the Holy, the Transcendent which is also immanent in the deepest centre of all things. My paper in this issue of the *Journal of Dharma* is an attempt to explore the contribution of the sciences to the methodologies of religions and theologies.

On the other hand, sciences themselves today feel the need for a religious dimension. As Jacob Needleman reports in "An Awkward

Question," people seem to be disillusioned by all the "breakthroughs" of science which apparently lead only to atomic bombs, pollution and drugs. The basic mysteries of science rather than frontiers waiting to be crossed by intrepid explorers, seem to be barriers "demanding an entirely new sense of what knowledge is." Yesterday science stood before Nature as a master and even the Church conceded the goodness of science and what it promised for mankind. But suddenly the scene seems to have changed radically. The ecological crisis tells us that behind the appearances there is in Nature an integrity more powerful than any envisioned by science. The discovery of ever new ultimate particles by physics reveals the limitations of our mind and the still unexplored world out there. Hence in dealing with the world of science we have to take into account its negative and positive aspects. W. Richard Comstock in his article "The Dark side of Science: Changing Features in the Alliance between Science and Religion" deals with the negative side, while the article of Patrick A. Heelan S.J. "Space as God's Presence" shows how close the experiences of science and religion are.

Today we are realizing that all science centres first and foremost around man. It is for the sake of man, and must serve the human purpose. This is particularly true about all sciences, especially biology and psychology. Leonard Feldstein shows how psychology finds its full meaning in the human person and in that way borders on the religious quest for the ultimate meaning of human life. Perhaps the most crucial question in discussing the relation between religion and science is the distinctive type of rationality that comes into play in the two disciplines. What we have done in this issue is to present a few partial perspectives on a difficult and complex issue, without in any way claiming to be exhaustive.

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