

EDITORIAL

Holiness is the aim or goal of so many different people—contemplatives as well as activists, poets and artists, laity and monks, pastors and parishioners, women and men of vastly different creeds and cultures. But what is this “holiness” which both the Bible and the *Bhagavad Gita* proclaim “thousands set out in pursuit of” but yet paradoxically so few seem able to attain? Precisely what is the meaning of “holiness” attested to by the lives of so many different saints from so many different traditions? What leads a Catholic monk like Thomas Merton to stand in awe and humility and shared recognition before the enriching sanctity of his fellow-Buddhist monk in Thailand?

In 1917, Rudolf Otto's *Das Heilige (The Idea of the Holy)* appeared; this little work literally awakened the staid European academic community to the futility of attempting to measure and thereby reduce descriptions of “holiness” to verbal formulae capable of being deciphered by reason through mere rational explanations. Instead, Rudolf Otto identified and pointed to “*Numen*” or the numinous dimension submerged within all “creature-consciousness;” *Das Heilige* proclaimed such “numinosity” or “religiosity” as a basic and fundamental characteristic of human nature itself; indeed it seems a dimension as basic to human nature as logic and reason and yet more profound than either of these intellectual operations. According to Otto, it is not even possible to accurately describe a human being without explaining in clear terms this transphenomenal or transcendental dimension. In more recent days, many have contributed to the discovery of this “numinosity” which most scholars now accept as being inherent in the nature of every human being. Anthropology and psychology in particular, have concentrated on exploring certain aspects of this newly unearthed territory. The extraordinary pioneering efforts of Claude Levi-Strauss and Carl Jung are already being deepened and surpassed by their successors in these emerging areas of interest. Yet if anthropologists, psychologists and historians of religion have paved the way for this new effort, philosophers and theologians have not lagged far behind. In recent times Mircea Eliade, Paul Ricoeur, Karl Rahner, and Bernard Lonergan are but the best known of those religious scholars who have probed what Rahner often calls the “supernatural existential” or what others refer to as “holiness.”

Yet in this very search, the European world has discovered that Asia had a rich and long tradition of emphasizing “holiness” as the penultimate spiritual value. Millenia ago in India, Yogis, Jains and Buddhists pioneered inward spiritual journeys into the depths of a more-than-rational wisdom and holiness. Moreover, in East Asia, Taoist and Ch-an-Zen spiritual masters have advocated similar explorations for countless generations. All these quests seem to point to and identify “holiness” as that “numinous” aspect of human-kind which demands further exploration.

Thus the quest for “holiness”, the search for the “*Numen*”, the realization of a goal more profound than reason and logic, has a long and varied history, indeed, a history as vast and as rich as the story of humanity itself. As the Holy Books of so many different traditions proclaim, countless numbers have set out on spiritual journeys in quest of this ultimate value called “holiness” or sanctity.

Within this context, *Journal of DHARMA* invited scholars to violate those ancient Buddhist and Taoist canons which warn against attempting to speak about that which is ultimately “beyond words and concepts.” In anticipation of deepened mutual understanding, it was thought useful to ask our scholars to describe “holiness” as classically envisioned by the Hindu, Jewish, Christian, Islamic and Buddhist traditions. Each article would attempt to mirror what each of these traditions proclaim as “holiness.”

Dr. Martin Kaempchen of the Viśwabhāratī-Śāntiniketan, W. Bengal, introduces the theme with a descriptive analysis of the various stages of the journey toward *Holiness* as traditionally followed by many especially, the Orthodox Hindu pilgrims commencing their long search at home and concluding at some holy shrine, preferably on the banks of the Ganges. This description is interesting to those who are eager to understand the dynamics of formation for spiritual realization in the Hindu traditions which antedate most of the world-spiritual heritages known today.

Professor Ary A. Roest Crolius of the Gregorian University focuses on holiness as depicted in the Qur’ān. Emphasizing the understanding of separateness or hiddenness inherent within the very etymology of “*QDs*”, Professor Crolius sub-titles his article as primarily an exercise in negative theology. Yet as the uniqueness and

special holiness of God become more vividly realized and appreciated, so do Divine Mercy and Compassion also become more apparent.

Leonard Obloy of the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, approaches our question in the tradition of Rudolf Otto. If God appears as the "*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*," the initial Hebrew response is to view "holiness" in terms of "otherness, separateness, or apartness"; awe, respects, and wonder are appropriate responses before a God who is "wholly Other." A related biblical strand also emphasizes the unique illumination or special light of understanding linked with Divine Holiness. Yet the special Hebrew contribution is to articulate and witness to holiness through relationship: Yahweh covenants and invites every one to "holiness."

Kenneth Omernick of the Gregorian University studies a single New Testament text, Matthew 5:48 "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect", as the basis for his reflection on the Christian call to "holiness." Jesus Christ's total expression of incarnate divine love serves as the perfect model for challenging each Christian to the perfection of love, an expansive call leading each person beyond mere adherence to law to a far more embracing identification and expression of love with all humans.

Joseph Spae of Chicago, a scholar with a rich background especially of lived dialogue in Japan, focuses on Buddhist models of holiness. Recalling Pascal as well as Otto, Spae sketches what he considers the numinous qualities of several Buddhist saints as models. His article explains how Buddhist holiness translates itself as a "penetration, compenetration and interpenetration of transcendent reality" into our milieu.

Dr. Thomas Manickam, CSWR, Bangalore, has developed his own vision of the spectrograph of *Holiness* in order to realize it as the "harmony of human life" in the context of the Vedantic world-vision, which is deeply founded on the three spiritual sources of the Vedic tradition, known as the *Prastānatraya*: *Upanishads*, *Brahmsūtras* and *Bhagavadgītā*. This vision proposes to keep our foundational and constitutive alignment with the *Cosmos* and *Theos* alive in order to enjoy the bliss of the Divine which is *Ānanda* transmitted to the heart of man by the Supreme Reality at the very moment of man's coming into this world. Man must be vigilant to live his pre-established

harmony which is holiness on his vanishing pilgrimage through the green pastures of this planet Earth.

In recent days, many in Asia have attempted to link more clearly sanctity or holiness in this world with the more transcendental aspirations of humankind, the classic Indian effort to find meaning within "samsāra." Focusing on the *Jivanmukthi* of Hinduism, Professor Caterina Conio of Milan University points to translucence as the Hindu witness to holiness. She then wrestles with the problem of tension and compatibility between the immanent witness and transcendental testimony suggested by the unique translucence of the *Jivanmukthi*.

We are grateful to our scholars for having reminded us of the fundamental orientations to holiness that lie at the roots of all religious traditions. Their articles ought to help us in our orientations as we also seek to clarify and understand more fully what this foundational call to holiness means to each of us and to our contemporary world.

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