

EDITORIAL

Word and Revelation constitute the most obvious and yet the most sublime in interreligious terminology. Eastern religions, which emphasize experience and realization as the goal of religion, do not generally speak of revelation but insist on the centrality of the Word. According to the Rg Vedic sage *Vac* entered human consciousness when man started naming things. Later grammar, poetry and ritual chants, refined it. But it is discovered in its authenticity only in the heart of the sage and only the one to whom the Divine Word discloses herself can really understand her. People are brought together by the Word and their ranks are determined according to their service of the Word. Hence the Word is the symbol of intercommunion among men as well as of their communication with God.

Western religions, which look for a redemption from sin and damnation by the helping hand of God, base their religious experience on Revelation, what that mighty Lord said and did in human history. But in itself revelation is an ordinary word commonly used by all people like newspaper reporters, sports-writers and television commentators whenever there is disclosure of some secret. It is one of the basic notions of reality after being, truth and goodness, indicating the relational character of being, most obvious as a relation between persons, but possible though less obvious between persons and things. It is also the most convenient starting point of religion since the concept is relational, social and practical in the sense of including even action. Though Religion discusses God as the mystery that constitutes the ultimate concern of human life, still it is a human phenomenon embracing the personal, social and practical aspects of man's existence.

But today this basic concept of world religions is facing a crisis since, as Teilhard de Chardin remarked a couple of decades ago, the people of our age are caught between the revolting experience of a depersonalizing Marxism on the one hand and a traditional Christianity which is rather lukewarm about the condition of human beings today. What has been said about Christianity is also true about other organized religions like Islam and Hinduism which still go along the tracks of their traditions. Today the Marxist ideology is discredited, but its place has been taken over by science and technology, which with promises of a rosy future as well as

dire predictions of an imminent world cataclysm, manage to keep people absorbed in their immediate problems and prospects and leave them little time to think of their ultimate concerns. People have no time or patience to erect an altar to an unknown and unknowable God when their houses are burning, lights are going out and taps run dry. Hence there is a great deal of apathy towards what a religious authority may tell people about a dead and distant past or an uncertain future.

This situation is further complicated by the particular paradigms introduced in the past and given currency ever since by interested groups to understand and explain God's word and revelation to man. For Hinduism the Word was experienced only by the sages. These put their experience into human words, the Scripture, the privileged preserve of the Brahmin elite to be understood only by those who attained the highest spiritual insight. Buddhism placed the stress on the handing down of the three baskets of Buddha's teachings, though each school had its own special baskets. For Islam the word of God was the heavenly book opened out to Mohammed, and even the interpretations of the text had to be traced back to the Prophet himself through tradition.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition the Bible is the collection of books written by human authors under the divine inspiration so that they are at the same time fully divine and fully human. But this God-man polarity has enabled people to put the accent on what they wanted. Karl Barth emphasized the divine element so much that the only function of man was to proclaim God's judgment without adding anything to it. He was speaking from the point of view of the preacher who would like to be accepted as the mouth-piece of God. Bultman, on the contrary, takes the listeners' point of view and says that, on the one hand, we have to cut through the myth and imagery of the human writers to arrive at the original event of the divine self-disclosure and, on the other hand, actually encounter the God who is still active in saving us as at the time of the original biblical event. Then the question of interpreting the words written millenia ago and that of finding the historical continuity between those times and ours become questions of crucial importance. Vatican II tried to reconcile these extremes by advertising to the communitarian dynamics by which the original experience of the Christ event was communicated by the immediate witnesses to the Christian communities and through them down the centuries to our own times, the teaching authority of the Church

guided by the Holy Spirit providing the guarantee for the faithfulness of the transmission. Here the special interests of biblical scholars and of the Ecclesiastical authority are quite evident. Paul Blanshard scoffed at the "fantastic assumption" of Vatican II that God had chosen "one group of narrowly educated prelates in one Church to be the *prime ducts* for the transmission of all divine truth to an unenlightened humanity". But what he ignores here is that the guidance of the Spirit is not an exclusive privilege of a few in authority but of the whole sacral community. In every religious tradition the community that reverently listens to God's Word is taken up into a higher level of spiritual existence.

Hence in the study of Word and Revelation we cannot start from any fixed position of any particular religious tradition. Intuition and tradition, actual personal encounter with God at the present moment as well as reaching back into the past through the centuries, the immediate concerns of man in suffering, misery and need as well as the ultimate concerns about eternal truths, are all involved in this understanding of the self-disclosing Word of God. So we have not tried to make any neat synthesis of the articles in this issue. We are presenting discussions on the concern of the community for the reconciling and saving Word of God—the popular rejection of the closed book of the Veda presented by the dominating priestly class and the discovery of a new Veda in people's own creative experience, the scholars' approaches to various religious texts, and on the Christian, Hindu and Chinese traditions, all side by side, so that the reader may gain a total experience of this complex problem and the different solutions offered. Are the different avenues of approach convergent, leading to a single view point? We do not think so. The matter is so rich that crowding them all into a single perspective may detract from their authenticity.

John B. Chethimattam