

EDITORIAL

Integration of the forces and sources of life, ideas and ideologies is essential for peace, prosperity and progress of any nation. In the case of nations which are historically and structurally constituted of diverse ethnic or racial groups, numerous and varied religious denominations, multilingual geographical areas, widely uneven economic social strata, and opposing political ideologies, integration becomes an urgency even for sheer survival especially in the context of imminent foreign threats. Most of the nations of the present day world, including the super powers, have to face this challenge of consolidating the various forces operating both overtly and covertly in their internal systems. This is the quintessence of integration which has as its aims the achievement of peace, harmony, cohesion, security, development and welfare.

“Emotional Integration” has been the catch-phrase and ideal of our nation right from the day of its declaration as a Republic. Something has been achieved in this respect; much, however, has yet to be done to make India a viable democracy functioning faithfully along the lines envisaged in the Preamble of the Constitution defining India: *“a Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic to secure to all its citizens: Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.”* To realize the spirit of these ideals India has to face many problems in order to achieve the minimum degree of consolidation needed for a functioning democratic set-up in which people may enjoy the feeling of unity and solidarity among themselves, even to a minimum degree, no matter to which group or affiliation they historically belong. In spite of many unsocial and antisocial, religious and antireligious separatist tendencies many well-meaning patriots still think sincerely in terms of a radical conscientization of the masses about our national ideals of democracy.

Well aware of this great need at this juncture, the Centre for the Study of World Religions at Dharmaram College, Bangalore, in collaboration with the Centre for Indian and Interreligious Studies, Rome, organized a Seminar to study the problem of National Integration from the perspective of the multireligious context of Indian Democracy. The theme of the Seminar was: “The Role of Religions in National Integration.”

The Seminar was held at the Viswa Yuvak Kendra, New Delhi, from 16-18 January, 1982 to mark the inauguration of Viswa Dharma Academy in Delhi as an extension study centre of CSWR, Bangalore. For reasons beyond our control we were not able to publish the papers of this Seminar immediately after the sessions. However, in view of the worsening situation in India and all over the world concerning matters related to religious pluralism and its impact on nationalism and internationalism we thought it appropriate to select the relevant papers for publication in this issue of *Journal of Dharma*. A separate volume in book form containing some more additional material selected from the Panel Discussions will be released by the Dharmaram Publications, Dharmaram College, Bangalore, very shortly under the title *Role of Religions in National Integration*.

Though most of the papers are addressed to the Indian situation, it is obvious that the overall message of the Seminar has certainly global significance since similar problems exist in many parts of the world. At a time when new religious movements are emerging in many countries, which might have repercussions on the consolidation process of their national and secular forces for affirming their commitment to the welfare of all citizens irrespective of their religious affiliations, the reflections shared in this Seminar are equally relevant outside India. Besides, we have observed that in the process of discovering the role of religions in the making of an integrated nation, religions themselves are engaged in a process of self-examination to assess their respective claims and promises to the people as well as the extent of their failure or success to remain faithful to their respective founders and original revelations. The representatives of the various religions who were invited to participate and address fellow-participants were sincerely critical of their own practices and expressed their views openly and fearlessly concerning the ideals and practices of the existing religious traditions in the country. They were not less critical about the Crusades, Jehads, Harijan-persecutions and apartheid.

On the whole the Seminar achieved a twofold purpose successfully. The participants, on the one hand paved the way for a rethinking about the most essential functions of any religion, and on the other, they prepared themselves for honest, open and sincere dialogue and collaboration in matters relating to national integration.

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