

EDITORIAL

The *Guru*, one of the oldest religious institutions, is one of the central themes in the contemporary religious discourses. Similarly, although the concept of authority, religious or otherwise, is being re-interpreted, if not rejected, the authority of a *Guru* seems to be getting more and more established in the contemporary world. Again, although a sense of religious indifference is apparent in the technologically developed countries, the *Gurus* of today are attracting larger and larger followings even in those countries. These observations indicate man's undying enthusiasm for *Gurus*, and something like a perennial interest for them. This is sufficient justification for devoting the present number of our journal to a study of *Gurus*, Spiritual Guides,

The idea of a *Guru*, although it appears in one form or another in almost all cultures and religions, is particularly associated with the Indian culture and religions. Hence we have two articles dealing with the Indian understanding of a *Guru* and his function. One of them, "The Paṇḍit: The Embodiment of Oral Tradition" by Prof. William Cenkner, presents *Gurus* coming under the category of "Paṇḍits" as the preservers of oral traditions; and, the other, "The Spiritual Guides and Disciples in Indian Tradition" by Prof. Puruṣottama Bilmoria is concerned with the very concept of a *Guru*, especially in relation to the concept of a *śiṣya* (a disciple). Dr. Paul Kalluveetil in his article "The *Guru* and the Hebrew Concept of the Prophet" discusses the understanding of spiritual guides in the Old Testament.

The psychologists have long been engaged in discussing the role of *Gurus* in one's personal life. Some of them, following Freud and others, have regarded religions as pseudo-solutions to the problems of man. But most of them would agree that *Gurus* do play a creative role in shaping human beings. It may be because in the hands of *Gurus* religion becomes more a personal matter than an institution. A question that is relevant in this context is whether it is possible for psychiatrists and counsellors to replace *Gurus*. The answer usually is in the negative. If so, what is it that distinguishes *Gurus* from psychiatrists and counsellors? Are there not some concerns and interests that are common to *Gurus*, psychiatrists and counsellors? These are the questions raised by Thomas Kalam in his article "The Role of Spiritual Guides from a Psychologist's Point of View." Dr. Irudayaraj in his article "Discipleship and Spiritual Direction in the Light of the

Tamil Saivaite Tradition” makes an attempt to understand the nature and function of the Church in terms of the relationship between *Guru* and *śiṣya*, implying the communion between Christ and his followers.

Finally there is a study of the ideas and ideals of one of the great *Gurus* of modern times, Vinoba Bhave, by Prof. Ishwar C. Harris. Vinoba Bhave did not perhaps ever claim to be a *Guru*. But millions of Indians have been influenced by his impressive personality and persuasive ideals, and they would readily accept him as their *Guru*. Therefore, Vinoba Bhave can be considered an example of a typical *Guru*.

Gurus and guruism seem to be playing a decisive role in building up the present-day culture and civilization. *Gurus* act as links between the West and the East, make up for the failures of institutionalized religions, fill in the spiritual vacuum experienced by those who reject the latter, and inspire new approaches to religious problems. Above all, guruism strikes a balance between the institutional and charismatic aspects of religion.

However, a real *Guru*, a *sat-guru*, is hard to come by. “The *Guru* is the man who is able to initiate others into the knowledge by experience of the mystery of God which he himself has experienced — and no more. The prefix *sat* adds the connotation of reality, of truth and of goodness. The *sat-guru* is the ‘Good Master’ of the Gospel (Mark 10 : 17). He alone introduces others to the Real, to *sat* ; he alone communicates to his disciples his own Spirit ; his words are spirit and life, and are seeds which bring forth fruit in the hearts of those who receive them with faith and love (Luke 8 : 15). Only he can speak of Being, *sat*, and lead men to it, who himself dwells in the bosom of the Father, the Origin and Source of all that is.”¹

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1. Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda*, Delhi (1974), p. 202.