

EDITORIAL

Why do patterns of worship change? Or rather do the forms of cult change according to the change of time? It is an undeniable fact that transformations of old forms of worship are taking place in almost all the major World Religions. Many are the reasons scholars advance to account for this phenomenon of change. The intimate relation between creed, cult and culture is certainly one among the foremost reasons for this religious reality. Major universal religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, in their course of earthly expansion, came in contact with cultures alien to the culture of their birth-place, and they voluntarily made an adaptation of themselves, taking care all the time to be faithful to their original creed, indispensable in their new-found cultural situation.

In the course of several years India has become the home of a number of World Religions. Though Christianity is a religion of non-Indian origin, the Church in India is as old as Christianity itself. Yet in these days we often hear that the Indian Christians must adapt themselves to their surroundings so that they may appear as true Indians, thinking, living and worshipping in conformity with the cultural heritage of India. In this process, it is said, the elements of truth found in the indigenous religion and the way of life (culture) and mode of worship (cult) prevalent in the given cultural situation should be made the vehicles of Christian faith, way of life and manner of worship.

This, of course, is not a problem Christianity is facing in India alone. The indigenization of Christian faith to the existing cultural patterns and forms of worship is a vital issue and Christianity is facing this wherever it is trying to break new ground for its existence. The story of the Christian faith in the context of Greco-Roman world has been told and retold so often by scholars that it hardly needs any mention now. In the history of the Church we find similar adaptations and adjustments of Christianity with local cultures in Asia and Africa. For example, the Thomas-Christians who had their home and habitat in Malabar (Kerala), on the south-west coast of India, achieved adaptation to or Christianization of some of the ways of life and mode of worship of the followers of Hindu religion. Three distinct phases can be distinguished in this process of acculturation and cultic adaptation. The first is at the intellectual level. Any religion which comes in con-

tact with a new people and their culture for the first time will have to evolve an indigenous theology which expresses, explains, coordinates, illustrates and defends its dogmas by means of philosophical categories known to the people in question. Next, the way of life of the people manifested in terms of food habits, dress, customs are being adopted, or rather preserved, as a religious faith makes advances into a new culture. Similarly, again, the existing mode of worship, as far as possible, will also have to be integrated into the new faith which is being proclaimed. This intellectual, cultural and cultic adaptation is a vital problem all missionary-religions in the world are aware of.

Buddhism, as it entered China and Japan, had to come to terms with Taoism, Confucianism and Shintoism respectively. Islam, as it emerged from the Arab world and spread to India and African countries, underwent similar changes in the lifestyle and mode of worship, though not in any significant manner. It is this religious phenomenon which the present number of Journal of Dharma proposes to discuss.

The inter-relation between culture and forms of worship is an acknowledged fact. The article "The Dynamics of Cultural Pluralism and Worship-Patterns" offers an analysis of those factors that cause the evolution of a plurality of worship-forms in the Indian context. "Limits of Worship in Indian Religions" by Thomas Kochumuttam makes a study of the philosophical background of several Indian religious traditions, including Buddhism and Vedānta, and shows that for many of them a cultic system based on the belief in a personal deity is unsuitable.

The Christian and Islamic perspectives of worship are analysed by A. Pushparajan and George Koovackal respectively. The main thesis of Pushparajan is that the worship, in its outward form, is closely related to the culture of the people both for adoption of the symbols needed for its external practice, and for the symbols to play their role properly in worship. "Worship in Islamic Tradition" makes an attempt to understand the meaning and importance of the external expressions of Islamic worship, with special emphasis on Prayer (*salat*).

"The Agamic Tradition of Worship" by Ignatius Hirudayam is mainly a case-study i.e., a descriptive account of various forms of Saivite and Vaishnavite worship. Louis Malieckal in his article "Cultural Currents and the Emergence of Worship-Forms" starts with a survey of the contemporary proliferation of small worship-

groups and indicates various possible lines of interpretation as regards their emergence. In the article "Dance as a Sacred Cult" Judith Harris shows how dance is not only a fine art just for aesthetic pleasure, but also a very powerful means for worship.

Men all over the world, cutting across the boundaries of cultures, races and creeds, made use of all that was natural to their way of life to express their religious sentiments. It was an ever-growing process, which still continues, although transformation of worship-patterns according to the evolving culture of the people is rather slow in the well-established and organized religious traditions. The religiously awakened man of our times, however, is duty-bound to make his worship forms relevant to the cultural context in which he is called to live.

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