

EDITORIAL

A senseless barbaric arms-race! Staggering abuses of the most basic of human rights! An impending nuclear holocaust! Global economic fright! Poverty and suffering to an extent never before experienced in human history! Yet, somehow and in some way, religions and religious convictions perdure. In spite of, or perhaps because of such harsh realities, religions and religious perspectives and religious values remain a foundational element of contemporary experience. Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Marxism, Tribal Religions still form, inform, and create human values and perspectives. How is this still possible? Why? Is Our Age still able to "stand-under" the spell of religious aspirations, still able to be inspired by religious hopes and dreams and goals?

Religions share three observable dimensions: energizing faith, specific doctrines and committed followers. Indeed, the very dynamism and vitality and effectiveness of a religion depends precisely on how well it integrates and correlates these three foundational elements of faith, belief and commitment. Commitment flows from inspiring beliefs which, in turn, are generated and nurtured by the creative energies of faith. Human growth and development, or perhaps inhuman stagnation and stultification, are vitally linked with religions, with the inner dynamics of these three basic dimensions of religious expression.

Faith is the primal anthropological act, a basic and even constitutive human dimension; its very role is to open the searcher to the profundity of life and existence by unlocking the Transcendence which encompasses humanity. By its very nature, faith must be ever-inexhaustible, always open to new insights, and utterly inexpressible in the medium of any particular human language. The classic Scholastic formula "*fides quaerens intellectum*" literally means that each faith-filled searcher must always be looking for greater understanding of constitutive faith.

Yet faith itself is an indelible mark of being human; one cannot exist and live without articulating numerous varieties of human faith. One cannot even press a light-switch without expressing a certain mode of faith. If faith be endemic to the human condition,

its articulation and expression within a variety of cultures and religions attests to the creative and informative influence which particular faiths develop in different peoples and cultures. When a Hindu or a Buddhist speaks of *śraddhā*, he describes faith as "that to which one chooses to commit one's heart." Without totally abandoning and yet without becoming enslaved to the norm of reason, such faith is always open to embrace whatever new self-verifying insights and intuitions arise to enlighten the human journey. Wholistic and totality thinking rather than mere rationality dominates the Indian quest for norms of religious verification. Any particular creed or doctrine or dogma is but a secondary conceptual articulation or understanding of the original act of faith. The Christian *credo* ("I believe") etymologically also means that to which one chooses to entrust one's heart (*cor*). Creeds, dogmas, doctrines, theologies are but verbal formulations, one radical step removed from the original energizing faith-experience. Faith then is the originating creative energy, the primal anthropological act, that by which various humans in a variety of cultures choose to define and entrust the totality of their life and existence to what they perceive as particularized expressions of Transcendence.

This number of *Journal of DHARMA* proposes to study how faith inspires and generates specific beliefs which, in turn, create the various traditions and commitments which thereby form different religions and cultures. Dr. V. F. Vineeth of Dharmaram, Bangalore, a scholar of both the Christian and Hindu traditions, opens our discussion with a speculative overview of the inner dynamics of faith, belief, and tradition considered as creative and formative forces for the human condition. According to him, Faith is an event that takes place in man as an answer to a radical quest in him by virtue of his openness. In its purity and profoundness it is directed to the Beyond and the Boundless, but in its reality and concreteness it always assumes definiteness and becomes a belief, a *credo*, that is, faith in a particular manifestation of the Absolute. Belief, as it consolidates life-styles and norms of behaviour after it, gives rise to traditions in human history. The dialectics between faith and belief is seen in all religions and this living dialectics turns out to be the source-power of revision and renovations of religions, changes and challenges in traditions.

Prof. Gualtieri of Carleton University, Canada, presents a critical analysis of the inner dynamics of "Faith-Belief-Transcendence" as developed by the Harvard scholar Prof. Wilfred Cantwell Smith.

While pointing out the various levels of transcendence Professor Smith elaborated in his book *Faith and Belief*, he focuses attention on the central category of religious traditions, namely "faith". Faith expresses itself in beliefs, but belief systems have to be transcended so that faith may be still the foundation of religious experience beyond the historical and cultural conditions of people. Professor David Abalos of Seton Hall University argues that the sociologist is most true to the discipline when he, himself, is actively involved in the creation and articulation of a viable religious paradigm for his particular age. His "Transformative Commitment: A New Paradigm for the Study of Religions" argues that dedicated, loyal commitment to a particular religious tradition demands that doctrines, dogmas, creeds and beliefs always need to be re-expressed in ever-challenging yet ever-energizing faith-experiences. The creative faith experience must constantly be rejuvenated. Only if this be so, can religions be said to be stimulating sources of liberating human growth and development.

Professor Muzammil Siddiqi of the Muslim World League studies Rāmānuja and Al-Ghazālī, two classic and towering figures from the Hindu and Muslim world. Despite what appear at first to be irreconcilable theological differences in doctrine and belief, the religious commitment of these two dedicated scholars enables them to meet "on an experiential level". When analyzed, the dynamics of the faith of Rāmānuja is not all that distant from the clear monotheism of Al-Ghazālī especially in its practical expression. Thus actual religious experience may very well be the meeting-place of scholars as well as mystics.

Within the T'ien T'ai Tradition of Chinese Buddhism, a similar question arose and was discussed in a celebrated debate in the tenth century. The famous Letter of Ssu-Ming Chih-Li focuses on both the tension and dichotomy between Faith and Wisdom and yet, ultimately, points to the complementary nature of these two dimensions. Professor Whalen Lai of the University of California at Davis studies the correlation of Faith and Wisdom within the T'ien T'ai Tradition. Wisdom may very well be the end-point of Faith, suggests his article.

If unlocking, unveiling, revealing and opening the human to Transcendence be the goal of religions, then the symbols which ex-

press this extraordinary claim must be thoroughly understood and properly translated. "Seeing Through: The Mirror as Religious Symbol" by Professor Charles Courtney of Drew university studies the "mirror symbol" as employed by the Ch'an Buddhist, the Vedāntic, the Islamic and the Christian traditions. Even though adapted in a variety of ways and even though expressed within widely-different cultural settings, all these traditions find the "mirror" an apt symbol for conveying those extraordinary moments and intuitions when the invisible becomes visible, for translating which each judges as the supreme revelation of Transcendence becoming immanent within the reality of the phenomenal world.

All of our scholars have attempted to offer an insight into the dynamic of how The Transcendent enters, creates, forms, informs and moulds values, cultures, particular religious traditions. Transformative commitment, vital dynamic beliefs and radically creative energizing faith are all prerequisites for religions which hope to contribute to human growth and development. The foundational creative and originating energy of all religions is faith. Paradoxically, faith never exists in a vacuum or total void; the Hindu faith is inexplicable without the cultural formation of Hinduism in India. Thus faith demands a commitment and belief in the culture and values; it is simultaneously in the process of articulating and creating. Yet, as Professor Abalos has noted, growth gets stagnated whenever dogmas or beliefs become frozen in the language or thought-patterns of a particular culture thereby destroying or evaporating the creative vitality of its originating faith. Hence all the great religious traditions proclaim that they themselves must ever be in a process of rejuvenation, reform and renewal. The very nature of faith demands such continual rejuvenation.

Frank R. Podgorski
Associate Editor