

EDITORIAL

We are living in a world where fictions are fast reckoned as facts, while facts are faster neglected as myths much before the creation of new fictions. This phenomenon engenders a tension between human possibilities and actualities, so much so, man today lives depending more on probabilities than certainties. This, indeed, is a serious predicament. This tension haunts people, practically, of all walks of life. The field of religion is no exception to this rule. There, it is felt more as a "crisis of identity" in the "mess of pluralism".

Pluralism of religions is neither a fiction nor a myth but a reality. There are actually many religions existing and thriving with complementary and some time contradictory claims. On the whole they are all considered to be the *logia*, speaking, of those who experienced "that which is One whom the seers call in many ways" (Rv. I. 164:46). However, apparently exclusivistic claims of various religions often place them for some fire tests: Questions of varied connotation are being asked from different corners by academicians as well as ordinary believers: all with the intention to specify the identity of each religion or movement. Such identity-tests include questions such as: "True religion or false religion" (without, ofcourse, defining what religion as such is?); "institutional or charismatic"?; "spiritualistic or psychosomatic"?; "theistic or humanistic"?; "hierarchical or federational" "organized or privatized"?; "male-chauvinistic or female-chauvinistic"?, all arise from a deeper concern for identifying the "real and acceptable" religion from many so called religions. The contributors of this issue of *Journal of Dharma* pick up some of these interesting questions and present their articles partially as responses to such questions.

The suspicion of identity reaches a climax often on occasions of planned inter-religious dialogues. The partners in a dialogue agree to co-exist as long as their mutual interests of survival and the claim of "uniqueness" are not seriously affected by any argument. If casually affected on any point they prefer to go back to their former isolationism and exclusivism. This is a danger that would jeopardize the good intentions of inter-religious dialogue. Though religious pluralism presupposes religious identities, to acknowledge the right of existence of one religion is not a matter of pragmatism or simple tolerance, but is part of the honest acceptance of man's reli-

giosity as such. Since man's ultimate concern is something religious and sacred it is part of one's ontological urgency to have some religion which articulates in some meaningful sequence the relationship between the transient and the transcendent. In this context extra cautions taken by one of the partners of dialogue to safeguard his own identity at the expense of that of others will end up in absolutism, arrogance, and intolerance as well as in lack of human respect and charity. What we feel today much more than ever before is the need of a healthy and mutually enriching communication-system which will also allow provisions for inter-communion of divine experience of persons in pluralistic communities where common human and fraternal concerns are superior values to segregationism, individualism and mutual "excommunication" on the basis of religion, the ultimate concern of man.

The attitude of reservation very often aired in inter-religious meetings by such expressions as listed below are not really human, expressive of human solidarity: "ready to accept the position of the other partner, but with some caution"; "willing to consider the other person and his religious feelings on principles of equality, but with some qualification"; "prepared to understand the foundational identity of all religious experience, but with a difference"; "unity", yes, but no "uniformity"; "union", yes, but no "communion"; "encounter", yes, but not without some "confrontation"; "dialogue", yes, but with provisions for "monologue too"; "conviction", yes, but "no conversion to truth"; "co-existence", yes, but no "pro-existence". These and many others like these seem to be paradoxes in inter-religious dialogue in a context of actual religious pluralism.

Considering these anomalies as things to be avoided in the future, Prof. Harold G. Coward in his article, "Theologizing in a world of pluralism", observes that theology (western) is forced to accept its limitations in the actual context of the living world religions, and consider the variety of religious experience with due respect to the principle of equality among the religions of a multi-religious context. Prof. Ronald A. Pachence approaches the fact of religious pluralism with a genuine and sincere proposal for sacramental communion as a solution to the problem isolationism.

Dr. Mervin V. Hanson presents a case-study of understanding the problem of religious pluralism from the point of view of the Mahāyāna

tradition of Buddhism. Another pattern of understanding the multi-dimensional character of truth has been illustrated from the life of Mahatma Gandhi by Prof. Mervyn C. D'Souza. Sr. Judith G. Martin wants to remove the male-chauvinism prevailing in Christian theologies of the West by means of introducing the alternative gender to speak of God as is part of the tradition in India. Dr. George Chemparathy presents a brief survey of the development of dialectical theology of the Christian West on non-Christian Religions from Karl Barth to Johannes Witte. We hope these views of some of our team of writers will initiate further researches and discussions on this crucial issue, the religious pluralism.

Thomas Manikkam
Editor-in-Chief