

## **Editorial**

### **Religious Other towards Harmony of Life**

Religion is one of the deepest dimensions of complex forms of human life, and most human beings find religious identity important today even in the wake of scientific and technological innovations and a market driven society. In all corners of the world and in all eras of history, people have wondered about the meaning of life, its origin and goal, and often the answer came in the form of religious beliefs and practices. Religions make fundamental claims regarding the ultimate concerns of life. Wittgenstein observed, "To believe in a God means to understand the question about the meaning of life. To believe in a God means to see that the facts of the world are not the end of the matter. To believe in God means to see that life has a meaning."<sup>1</sup> The capacity for believing is as important as reasoning for human survival, growth and development; it is the basis of human relations. We live by beliefs, though we search for the truth, as there are in our lives many more truths that are simply believed in than are acquired by way of scientific or personal verification. Religion is a fundamental human way of living in the world in relation to fellow human beings and God; it also shows who we are and how we ought to live. According to Wittgenstein, "... a religious belief could only be (something like) passionately committing oneself to a system of coordinates. Hence, although it's belief, it is really a way of living, or a way of judging life. Passionately taking up this interpretation."<sup>2</sup>

Religion and life are inseparable, for a believer; it shows the basic character and spirit of believers' living. To belong to a religion means not only accepting its creed and observing the rituals and practices but also being part of a community and a form of life. Religious identity is integral part of personal

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<sup>1</sup>Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914-1916*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1961, 74.

<sup>2</sup>Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, G. H. von Wright, ed., Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1998, 73.

identity; it is inextricably intertwined with physical, professional, ethnic, political and national identities, and they are influence physical, intellectual, economic and political power. The whole world looks different to a religious person and the believer's attitude to the world is also significantly different. The world of the religious person is different from one who has no faith. The difference is not empirical, but seeing religious significance in the very existence of one's life in the world. It is one's religious identity that gives a person the ultimate meaning of life. For a believer, it is the way of making sense of one's life.

Ethics, Creed and Cult are constitutive of all religions, and they are guided by the Scriptures in world religions. Life and words of the founders of religious paths are normative for believers for deciding what is good, right and just. In making religious claims believers adopt personal and passionate attitudes to the world, community, and God. Believers could belong to religious beliefs and practices in different ways. For some the creed and cult are fundamental; others insist on ethics; for some others belonging to a religion is cultural. The relation between state and religion is also complex: Theocratic societies identify political and religious power; in some other countries there is national religion other religions are permitted; secular democracies do not prefer any one religion; there are also political power that suppress any religious practices.

Belonging to one religion includes attitudes and relations to other religions and ways of life. Religious traditions make different claims with regard to religious other be it different sects or denominations within the religion, other religion or non-religious persons. These could be examined using the trichotomy of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. Soteriological exclusivists insists one's own religion as the only true religion and restrict salvation only to their ways of beliefs, worship and code. They deny that there are several equally acceptable ways of living or that one is free to choose as one pleases; instead, they assert that one way of being human is

fundamentally correct and ought to be followed by everyone. They typically persuade others to recognize the validity of their claims, but their considerations provide only a framework or a system of reference rather than an independent foundation. Credal and cultic questions would lead to clarification and insistence on orthodoxy while challenges to the economic and political power lead to fundamentalism. Inclusivists believe that there is only one true religion though other religions in different ways belong to the one true religion; and ethical behaviour is more important than uniformity in creed and cult. According to pluralists different religions are different paths in human search for truth and meaning of life. Within each religious tradition we find scholars holding different shades of these three positions.

In human history religion and religious identities and their attitudes toward religious other had positively promoted harmony of life, locally and globally, and it is also part of the same history that they had caused mutual hatred and many inter- and intra-religious conflicts and wars. Religious scriptures and traditions that are part of sacred tradition have also exclusive, inclusive and pluralistic views. Increasing religious literacy and knowing religious others contribute to learning to live together in harmony of life. With dialogue and fellowship in religious experience it is possible to cultivate an attitude of respecting all religions and make use of religions as agents promoting harmony of life locally, nationally and globally. It is with this goal, *Journal of Dharma* focus in this issue on "Images of Self and Others".

In the first article, "The Dialogue of Spirituality from *Ecclesiam Suam* to Pope Francis: A Tree that has to Become a Forest," Abbot Timothy Wright critically examines the developments in Catholic-Muslim dialogue since the publication of *Ecclesiam suam* of Pope Paul, which inaugurated a new era of dialogue among Christian churches, religions and the world. The author presents a dialogue of spirituality that could bring the two communities to come closer together. In a creative way he presents how Pope Paul VI sows seeds, Pope

John Paul II cultivates the sapling into a tree, and Pope Benedict XVI prunes the tree, and he hopes that Pope Francis would revive the tree and enlarge it to a forest. Undivided love for one God and charity towards one's neighbour are the characteristic of both Islam and Christianity. Though there are differences of faith and worship, both Muslims and Christians can pray together and enhance Catholic-Muslim relations.

Gavin D'Costa examines two issues in the second article, "Dialogue with Islam: *Ecclesiam Suam* – Pushing out the Boat:" first, the meaning and ambiguity of the word 'dialogue' and how it has caused problems in actual interreligious 'dialogue' with Islam; and second, he offers critical and creative thoughts on the *doctrinal* achievements of *Ecclesiam Suam* and the Council's teachings on Islam and some subsequent developments. This is because he is convinced that the doctrinal achievements are central for mapping out the future possibilities of Catholic Muslim dialogue. Though the author offers topics that one could speak of in Catholic-Muslim relations like the richness of spiritual exchange between these traditions, or sadly, the murdering of each other in some parts of the world, or the denial of free practice of religion by Muslims towards Catholics and Christians in parts of the world, or happily, the remarkable socio-political cooperation between Catholics and Muslims when faced with pressing and often tragic social problems, the article focuses on the theological-doctrinal issues.

The relationship between identity and alterity is always a matter of tension. This becomes all the more true, when it deals with the dialectic of identity of a major insider group *vis a vis* the alterity of a minority outsider group. A harmonious co-existence of between a group with strong identity consciousness and an alterity is possible only if they develop a reciprocal reconciling attitude. Memories of the past can influence this relation positively and negatively depending on their openness to forgive and repair. In the article, "Identity and Alterity in the Book of *Jonah*" Joy Philip Kakkanattu examines

the various aspects of the identity-alterity relation taking the biblical prophet Jonah as a paradigm.

George Kaniarakath in the article, "The Merciful and Empathetic Jesus of the Lucan Gospel," explores the orientation of the Gospel to the whole of humankind - to the Samaritans, people of other nations and cultures, women and sinners. The selection of materials in Luke like the parables of the Good Samaritan, and of the Prodigal Son are powerful indicators of the special thrust of the Gospel. This is amply clear in the teachings and deeds of Jesus who appears as ever open, merciful and empathetic to all. While accepting the equal dignity and worth of women and men, he was aware of their different roles in life. He was also open to people of other faiths. It shows that the divine mercy or action goes beyond all geographical, religious and cultural barriers, and Jesus is *the* saviour of the world.

The article, "Islam in a Pluralistic Society," Farida Khanam gives Islamic principles on how to live in a pluralistic society. The basic principle in this regard is mutual respect. While Islam believes in the oneness of reality, it lays equal stress on the practice of respect in everyday dealings with others. Islam promotes acceptance of diversity and differences and seeks to promote unity using the principle: 'Follow one, and respect all'. Religious freedom is a pivotal practice of Islam. Acceptance and celebrating it requires that everyone be allowed to present one's thoughts, and be given a quiet hearing. Essentially, Islam promotes predictability of behaviour, which is a consequence of belief in the Hereafter. As such a believer must adhere to the values of love, justness and compassion in one's dealings with others.

Knowing one's own religious identity as well as religious other is important in increasingly pluralistic world where accepting alterity is imperative for harmony of life. The old maxim, that no man is an Island is true about religious identities: No religion is an island. It is important to investigate the family resemblances that different religions share to one's self and one's neighbours so that we live together in harmony

and become agents of peace and harmony in the society. Understanding the religious dimensions of societies and peoples enable the believers and non-believers in all walks of life to understand and interpret the diverse religious beliefs and practices around them. Religion is not primarily an intellectual enterprise, though not without cognitive content; it is a way of life involving nature, nurture and grace. Plurality of religions is not just something that is to be tolerated, but something precious that is to be celebrated. Conversation and collaboration among members of various religions promote social integration and harmony of life. Coming together as fellow pilgrims is necessary for all religions to counterbalance the excesses of materialism and technocratic market society, and also to resist the growth of religious fundamentalism that would subvert universal values, sow promote divisive and narrow identities, bringing death rather than life to all. The followers of different religions have more reasons to work toward harmony of life. In the contemporary globalized and globalizing world all religions could positively contribute and together work toward greater harmony and well being of all people and earth. It is with this conviction and hope for greater harmony of life that I submit this issue of the *Journal of Dharma* on "Images of Self and Others: Religious Perspectives."

**Jose Nandhikkara, *Editor-in-Chief***