

Editorial

A RENEWED CALL TO INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

While editing this number of Dharma on "A Renewed Call to Interreligious Dialogue" Ahmedabad where Mahatama Gandhi's Sabarmathi Ashram exists, is still witnessing the pogrom against the Muslims. The ongoing macabre death dance in the name of religion has knocked India off the moral high ground it claims with regard to religious harmony and tolerance. The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre (Sept 11, 2001), and on the Indian parliament (Dec 13, 2001), and the recent Sabarmati Express massacre (Feb 27, 2002) and the ongoing unabated slaughter of Muslims in the various parts of Gujarath have thrown a spanner into the ongoing movements of inter-religious dialogues. Ayodhya is plunging India into a searing crisis that has the potency to tore the polity at the seams in the coming years if it is not contained to the satisfaction of minorities. Against the backdrop of the ongoing communal violence in various parts of the world, the question being often raised is whether the inter-religious dialogue has reached a limit-situation. Do people now begin to lose trust in the interreligious dialogue?

In the same breath, we have to ask the pertinent question whether we have any other veritable way to contain the communal violence. Dialogues are the only sure and sane means to uproot the ethnic and religious bias deep down the collective unconscious, the source of the communal frenzy. Cleansing process has to start from the dungeon of the unconscious though it is a slow and painstaking process. This is possible only in a dialogical context. Indeed the dialogue has to go on in a more vigorous and vibrant way more than ever before because of the simple logic that there is no other alternative to face the ongoing communal hatred and violence. But interreligious dialogues have to expand their arenas and horizons so that they address wider issues and concerns which are crucial in the peace process.

Till recently interreligious dialogue has been conceived as an encounter between religions, and theological and spiritual issues have been the main concerns on the agenda. In the present scenario interreligious dialogue has to grow beyond mere religious issues into cultural and political questions. In India there is no sharp divide between sacred and secular. There is a continuum among religion, culture, politics, economy, philosophy and spirituality. Moreover, religion, besides its transcendental dimension, is also the vital referent of one's ethnic, cultural and political identity. In India, and

also in the global level, especially when people and nations are today grouped together in terms of civilization rather than ideologies, secular nature of polity cannot exclusively be interpreted in terms of a sharp divide between the sacred and the secular. It implies that religious archetypes and symbols are quite operative and vibrant at the depth of political psyche and identity. The separation between religion and politics or culture seems academic. Even in Europe religious bearing of culture and politics is increasingly asserted and upheld in the present scenario of religious fundamentalism.

What is driven home is that interreligious dialogue can offer a critical platform on which people of various political, religious and cultural allegiance can come together and interact on the common issues to build up a world community in a pluralistic frame. Here interreligious dialogue is a journeying together of various cultural and ethnic groups; here success is journey itself, not a destination. This journey is possible in a fellowship of reconciliation, a reconciliation which respects diversity. Interreligious dialogue should be able to lead the world community to a reconciled diversity, in all its spectrum of life, whether it is cultural or political, or economic, or religious. This reconciled diversity is a plurality in unity. It is a vision and experience which will help us to see the 'whole' in each 'part'. This reconciliation which respects and incorporates the plurality, every context and concern, is something to be attained consciously and earnestly through a dialogue in life. When the world community is further segmented and fragmented, and each ethnic and religious minority group is increasingly becoming inward looking on the onslaught of fundamentalism, honest efforts are to be initiated, both at the individual and collective level, to sustain the interreligious dialogue against all odds before the situation comes under the fundamentalist sweep and deteriorates itself beyond redemption. It is the time of rededication to the mission of interreligious dialogue. The articles in the present number advocate the need of situating interreligious dialogues on a wider spectrum and of addressing concerns and questions beyond religious issues. Some of the articles in this number are papers presented in the two national seminars on interreligious questions conducted at the Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram. Hope this number will help the readers to look at the phenomenon of interreligious dialogues in a new frame and urgency.

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