

EDITORIAL

Most of the world religions have come of age in the second millennium confronting their internal conflicts and encountering the challenge of other cultural and religious forces. The European renaissance and enlightenment guided by the spirit of rationalism in the modern period seem to have necessitated a process of secularization leading to the emergence of a mutually distancing framework for religions and the scientific and humanistic culture. The present number of *Journal of Dharma* primarily concentrate on the internal conflict religions have faced in the second millennium, preparing their way to reckon with the postreligious discourses of the postmodernity.

Side by side with growth and claims of religions the elite in the modern democratic countries, being aware of the dangers of religious bigotry and fanaticism, go for secularism as a principle of governance for their civil society. Is the ideology of secularism a threat to world religions or an unavoidable political theory in a world of religious pluralism? Not only religions but also even cultures, especially the Western and the Eastern, come in direct conflict for superiority and here the academic world recognizes the need of multiculturalism in its discourse.

As the survey of Arvind Sharma in this issue on secularism shows the discourses and debate, both old and recent are very rich and mutually opposing in the Indian context. According to Sharma both the old modernist, liberal-humanist and materialist version of secularism and the uncritical and colonial construct of secularism as non-interference of political powers in the affairs of religion has to be replaced by a 'liberal religious education at least in one's own tradition in private life.'

From the contemporary critique of the binary opposition of secularism and religion two opposing trends emerge namely, a growing fundamentalism within religions and a transformative attempt to create new dialogical religious identities. According to this 'transformative thesis' religion is not a spent force, but rather a phenomenon that could be adapted itself in novel ways to suit the requirements of the contemporary society. Habermas remarks that even philosophy cannot write of the relevance of religion today, for he writes: "Philosophy even in its post metaphysical form, will be able neither to replace nor to repress religion as long as religious language is the bearer of a semantic content that is inspiring and even indispensable, for this

content eludes the explanatory force of philosophical language and continues to resist translation into reasoning discourses."

Will religions survive in a rational and secular world? The mission of the religions is to bring down the sacred into the experiential limitation of space and time (*saeculum*). Religious renaissance always involved a further secularization of the divine and so in the proper sense secularism never needs to come in opposition to religions. The constitutional Indian secularism is a distinctly Indian variant of secularism, which instead of erecting a strict wall of separation proposed a 'principled distance' between religion, and state, which avoided a bludgeoning privatization of religion. When conceptual clarity on secularism is achieved India could become a model democracy where religions could co-exist with mutual respect.

Rabbi Allen S. Maller describes Judaism as a religion based on the meaning given to specific events in Jewish history, which commit them to establish a good and holy society, that would eventually become a blessing for all humanity. Religion is seen as a reality in the heart of human society. Judaism implies a theology of history. The author writes: "Since Jews are already an international community with a long tradition of being a minority culture in a pluralistic world, they will probably be among the first to react to the challenges of the 21st century and the new millennium." Hinduism also claims the history of five long millennia. Hinduism originated from the vedic religion of the Aryans. Swami Nityasthananda gives a graphic picture of the development of the seminal vision of the Vedic seers. Though the most conspicuous characteristic of Hinduism during the second millennium was its Bhakti movement the article also gives a short account of various trends in Hinduism in the second millennium.

As in the case of all other religions the history of the Christian religion in the second millennium is very complex. At the dawn of second millennium Christianity was mostly a European religion and a religion of the eastern part of the former Roman Empire. Its history has been extended to all continents through the colonization process of European Christianity. Francis Thonippara leads us through the challenging crossroads of the European Christianity to state where it stands at the moment.

The story of the journey of Islam in the second millennium narrated by Mumtaz Ali Khan assesses changes, direction of the changes and Islam's relation to these changes. The main idea that emerges from the article is that

"socio-cultural systems in Muslim society have their own identity as distinct from those of the other social groups in India and therefore Muslims find it difficult to join the mainstream of the society." The modern forces of science and the technology have devastating effect on human behaviour and thinking and so Islam also has, to a certain extent, recognized these forces.

In the article on Sikhism, the youngest of the world religions, Shashi Bala, besides illustrating briefly the founder and other Gurus and scriptures, highlights also the theological and cultic aspects of *Khalsa* and the social-political movements and the future of Sikhism in the present scenario. Its mission is said to be 'not to make conversions but to bring back the followers of any religion to their original faith.'

A.K.Merchant's article on the Baha'i Faith unambiguously states its doctrinal position: "Like the chapters of a weighty book, each Faith unfolds the spiritual genius of humankind and paves the way for its continuing advancement. The Baha'i Faith, Baha'is believe, is the latest chapter to this process of divine unflodment." They however, understand other religions as 'the package of divine guidance brought to humanity from time to time by spiritual luminaries.' The contention of Onah Augustine Odey's article is that the exclusion of effective religious education from the Nigerian schools is the root cause of indiscipline in the schools. He passionately argues that, "we need religious education reintroduced into our school system in order to restore discipline, dedication to duty and honesty in our schools and society."

The journey of religions through the third millennium is not going to be less turbulent than its development in the second millennium. Secularism, a product of modernism, which was in opposition to religions, has still to be made operative in the postmodern era, not as in the past by erecting a strict wall of separation between religion and state and strictly privatizing it, but by articulating a new variant of it as it is envisaged in the Indian Constitution that the religious values which always up hold the virtues of justice, equality, honesty, fraternity, mutual respect and an egalitarian sense among the individuals and ethnic, religious and linguistic minority communities could become the bill of rights of our social living.

Thomas Kadankavil

Editor