

EDITORIAL

The study of religions today compels us to recall the various theories evolved in the course of development of the religious consciousness of humankind. It also makes us to retrieve the various approaches and diverse attitudes scholars held throughout the history of religions until today. This issue of *Journal of Dharma* highlights certain aspects of the scientific study of religions.

Our understanding of religion and our approach and attitude towards it have an evolutionary history. To start with, the initial studies were centred on the theories of origin and development of different religions. This interest of the scholars of the 'History of Religions' gave rise to the formation of theories of Animism, Mana, Totem and Magic. Then the trend was along the line of discovering similarities and parallels in various religious traditions and mythologies. Later scholars developed interest to explain and interpret the meaning, structure and essence of religious phenomena. Thus emerged sociological approach to the study of religions followed by Emile Durkheim, Max Weber and others; Psychological interpretation of religion by Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung; Structural and Functional approach by Bronislaw Kasper Malinowski; Phenomenological approach by Max Scheler and Symbolic approach initiated by Mircea Eliade.

The contemporary trend in the study of religions is moving toward creating a common platform made up of the histories of all religious traditions emphasizing 'we-consciousness' of our human existence. It is a relationist and participational approach towards sharing in some symbolic way God's mystery in the milieu of mutual listening, reflecting and entering into a communion of heads and hearts. It makes religions to penetrate into the obscure veils of words, symbols, dogmas, rites and help us realize the essence of religions.

However, a more scientific approach which promotes objective analyses of the variety of religious experience might still be more meaningful. In our approach to the study of World Religions what we need today seems to be a critical attitude that may bracket all other 'interests' for the sake of true and genuine search for truth

in other religious traditions. Art, architecture, myth, metaphysics, philosophy, social ethics, symbols, theology all of which are constituents of religious traditions are "truly spiritual and they should all be consciously coordinated in one great religion of Man, representing his ceaseless endeavour to reach the perfect in great thoughts and deeds and dreams . . . revealing his aspiration for rising in dignity of being" (Tagore : *The Religion of Man*).

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