

## EDITORIAL

All the World Religions have their own sacred Scriptures which are the authoritative sources for their teachings and practices. Almost all the Scriptures claim to have a divine origin either directly or indirectly. But approaches to Scriptures differ from religion to religion. For many religions, Scriptures contain the Word of God or Utterances of God, given to humans for their guidance and salvation. Most of these Scriptures existed first in oral traditions and later written down by human agents who often claimed to have a divine inspiration. Some religions have their beginnings in the Enlightenment of their founders, and the original experience of these founders was passed on to their disciples and later generations through oral and written traditions which became later their sacred Scriptures. Their authority derive from the authority of their founders.

Some religions and religious schools understand their Scriptures in a literal way, where as others think that Scriptures need to be interpreted as their meanings are not very clear due to the fact that they are in the language and traditions of a bygone age. To bring out the real meaning of those texts for today we require different kinds of exegetical methods. The present Number of the *Journal of Dharma* is on the Scriptures of the World Religions and the different approaches to the Scriptures.

In Hinduism the Scriptures do play a unique role. One becomes a Hindu not by his/her belief in God but by his/her acceptance of the Vedas. The "Vedas" are the most ancient among the Hindu Scriptures, and they are said to be the "breath of God", the Eternal Word, and not something created or written by God. The Rishis who were in intimate communion with the Absolute Reality heard this Word and passed on this to their disciples. They are the source and basis of all human knowledge and truths. Buddhist Scriptures are the teachings and discourses of Gautama Buddha after his Enlightenment which were systematized, fixed and later written by the disciples of Buddha and the Great Buddhist Councils. Unlike the Vedas, Bible and Koran, the Buddhist Scriptures do not claim any absolute authority. Buddha did not want his disciples to be slaves of any kind of authority. Rather he wanted every human being to be totally free and his teachings were meant to lead everybody to absolute freedom.

Both Judaism and Christianity consider the Old Testament as as their sacred scripture which contains the Word of God. It is the story of God's dealings and sayings with His chosen People, Israel. Christian approach to the Bible is very complex. Bible is not

a historical documentation. At the same time it contains historical facts and events. It is the Word of God. But at the same time it is written by human authors, The Bible, both the Old Testament and the New Testament, is the Word of God in human words. The Word of God in the Bible is the Word of the Living God, and it can lead the believers always to new meanings and challenges.

Islam considers Koran as the infallible Word of God verbally revealed to Prophet Muhammad at various moments of his life over a period of 23 years. For Muslims the Koran is the Word of Allah, a perfect transcription of an eternal tablet preserved in heaven. The sacred Scripture of Sikhism is called "Sri Guru Granth Sahib" which contains the teachings and hymns of the great Sikh Gurus who had compiled them incorporating the teachings and views of various religions, especially the teachings of many Hindu and Muslim saints. Hence it is a rare kind of Scripture which has a catholicity of outlook, and Sikhism is thus the result of a religious synthesis, especially between Hinduism and Islam. For the Sikhs, the Scripture is the "Gurbani" Guru's words, which is considered as the Eternal Word, the Divine Word because the Gurus were God inspired persons who had direct communication with God.

This brief introductory and comparative study of the Scriptures of the major World Religions, as presented in this Number of the *Journal of Dharma*, reveals a tremendous convergence. Sacred Scriptures are essential to and constitutive of all the World Religions. They have a natural and spontaneous origin and evolution from oral to written traditions, and they all claim certain divine origin and authority. They witness to some unique experience of humanity at certain periods in the history of particular people. For the believers they are the revelations of God as well as human responses to God's revelation. But the meanings of the Scriptures are often not self-evident, but to be discovered by exegesis and interpretation which would reveal the polyvalent meaning of the Scriptures. As the living Word of God the meaning of the Scriptures "for us today" seems to be more important than their meanings in the past. The Scriptures are the heritage and property of the whole humanity. If this is true, their meaning has to be discovered by a common effort of the whole humanity in dialogue with each other. Hence interreligious dialogue on the sacred Scriptures of the World Religions is of paramount significance for the future of religion and of humanity.

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