

## EDITORIAL

Somewhere at the climax of a pedantic debate, Protagoras, the most formidable of the Greek Sophists hurled at his opponent what would later become the cardinal principle of secular humanism, "Man is the measure of all things." Although in subsequent centuries wave after wave of Christian writings succeeded in almost totally suppressing this "pagan" anthropocentrism, it seems that today Protagoreanism is coming back with a vengeance. The dominant feature of the contemporary consumer society is the overwhelming emphasis given to man and his concerns and the visible eclipse of other-worldly concerns and faith in a transcendent reality. In other words, the contemporary scene reflects a shift of interest from the supernatural to the natural, from the divine to the human. Anthropocentrism is today reaching a climax, resulting in the glorification and almost deification of man. While the Middle Ages gave shape to a world that was theocentric and "closed", the builders of the modern world are today busy developing a world that is anthropocentric and "open". Today man's needs and aspirations, his frustrations and anxieties, his comfort and convenience, determine what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong.

The consequences of the changed vision are too obvious to ignore. Especially in the industrialized countries of the West, traditional religions have lost much of their grip on man. The veracity of traditional religious beliefs and values and a way of life based on them are being questioned today covertly and overtly. Besides, many are fed up with the sick religiosity and the morbid religionism while others see religions dividing people rather than uniting them. Some of the secular assumptions of modern democracy, the pull of consumerism, the emergence of new secularistic philosophies, the impact of the scientific and technological revolution, and man's conscious and unconscious longing to place himself at the centre of the universe have all played a role in the emergence and growth of secular humanism and the humanistic religion. Many are proud they are adherents of the humanistic religion or what their adversaries label as "godless secular humanism". They endeavour to free man from the shackles of the divisive and growth-hindering philosophy and praxis of traditional religions. Their goal is to shape a world where the emphasis is on the unity of mankind and the happiness of man in *this* world. The world they visualize is a world where man and his concerns assume primacy. They are attempting to project the new image of man as sufficient unto himself. In short, they are presenting secular

humanism or the humanistic religion as a viable alternative to traditional religions.

In their analysis and evaluation of the issue, the authors of the articles have maintained an unbiased and creative approach to both secular humanism and religion. They have judiciously refrained from condemning one to glorify the other. For one thing, both humanism and religion have to learn from each other; each, having its own positive elements which the other may lack, has the obligation to act as a corrective agent to control the excesses of the other. In a not too narrow sense, therefore, they have a complementary role to play although traditionally they have been viewed as antagonistic to each other. Secular humanism has always been a reminder to religion that it should not lose sight of the "human" factor while tackling man's problems. Religion, on the other hand, through its incessant proclamation of the transcendental dimension has prevented secular humanism from falling into the abyss of the meaningless, the chaotic, even the diabolical. In the contemporary situation, therefore, a healthy engagement of secular humanism and religion has to be viewed not with scepticism and apprehension but with hope and optimism. The articles in this issue, then, allow us to infer one thing: there is no need for panic - secularism is not going to devour religion. As Wolfhart Pannenberg has observed, although in the public awareness of today's secular culture religion is not taken seriously as a determinative human theme, it can not go on for ever ignoring religion. For, "Secular culture itself produces a deep need for meaning in life and therefore also for religion. The anxiety that the progress of secularization will turn religion into a peripheral phenomenon which increasingly fades away can now be said to be unfounded and obsolete" (W. Pannenberg, *Christianity in a Secularized World*, New York: Crossroad, 1989, p. 43). If the proof of the pudding is in the eating, then the best evidence for this sort of optimism is the dramatic resurgence of religion in the countries of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and the more vigorous reappearance of traditional religions in many parts of the world. In the meanwhile, however, it would be a wise step, especially on the part of those who are supposed to guard the ramparts of traditional religions, to see to it that the overwhelming influence, and sometimes even the merciless assault, of secular humanism on religion and the transcendent do not destroy the authenticity and credibility of traditional religions.

**Jose Thadavanal, CMI**  
*Associate Editor*