

EDITORIAL

Not only in Pakistan, but also in many other countries, the role of religion is increasingly becoming an important consideration for understanding human behavior especially in culturally diverse communities. Despite the secular values of modern society, the religious behavior of communities has been of interest to social planners, economists, politicians, scientists and even the intellectual community. It seems that religion still has a significant influence on many areas and phases of human life and social interaction. Signs of the persistent significance of religion for international relations and for relations between the internal socio-political arrangements of nations and individuals are leading to the realization that the study of religion can offer useful insights into modern realities. Recognition of the influence of religion on large sections of the society throughout the world may also provide some explanation for the grievances and frustrations that have led to religious violence in recent times. Violence and conflict have had a disturbing impact on each nation of the global community. Since the study of religion has become so significant today, many universities, institutes, and research centers throughout the world are offering religious studies as a field of study.

This biannual journal is one effort to study the role of religion in the contemporary world. It is published by the *School of Religion & Philosophy* at Minhaj University Lahore, Pakistan. Its contributors address some crucial areas in the study of religion, both keeping in mind the local context with its debates and discussions and also remaining alert to the global exigencies that impact on the region and its scholarship on religion and its links with other socio-cultural developments.

This journal attempts to disseminate what various scholars and researchers from across the world have to share. The articles in this edition of *South Asian Journal of Religion & Philosophy* have been written by authors living in the Asian region and in

the global North who believe that the study of religion and society will keep the discussion healthy, energizing and productive. Some authors challenge the common assumption that religion is a private affair between an individual and God while others argue that God cannot be discussed on the level of 'public religion' as this may distort the concept of God.

In the first article, Miriswaththe Wimalagnana analyzes two important Buddhist sources (*Sandakasutta* and *Apaṇṇakasutta*) and argues that the Buddhist way of inter-religious discourse is expressed most adequately by means of the Middle Way, which should be understood as the avoidance of every kind of extreme view. The Middle Way accepts both the religious efforts of a missionary as well as the pluralist or relativist views of religion because human beings have a right to promote their own religion provided they observe moral principles. The author argues that genuine conviction (*saddhamma saññatti*) does not encourage self-aggrandizement by disparaging others and states that the pluralist outlook of Buddhism is exclusive with respect to its claim to truth but relative in relation to other religions. The canonical literature of Buddhism records numerous Buddhist encounters with the followers of other religions based on mutual respect, acceptance of the right for missionary endeavor and the preservation of an attitude of tolerance.

In the second article, Oswald Firth argues that the separation of religion from politics is characteristic of Western thinking. In his view, however, it is unreasonable to consider religion as totally isolated from politics even though there are those who say that the two are diametrically opposed, one belonging to the secular order and the other hovering in the realm of the sacred. Religions should find a meaningful space in political life and become efficient dialogue partners in public conversations for the common good. The growth of various forms of religious nationalism and the emergence of civil society are indications that, instead of choosing to consider themselves as entirely autonomous entities, politics and religion can be seen in mutual

collaboration. The author refers to the social unrest in his country (Sri Lanka) as a case study and concludes that the resurgence of religion and politics in the institutional life of society across the globe requires a fresh discussion of the role that both religion and politics play in society.

The third article, by Uzma Naz, also discusses the relationship between religion and politics. The author highlights the positive role of religion in peacemaking and in resolving conflict. Her view is that the ultimate power of religion comes not from official backing or political protection, but from the sense that its teachings are real. Religion needs a certain space to contribute to the welfare of society and, therefore, must keep some distance from politics, economics, science and technology. The author indicates that historical events have shown that religion itself can be a source of conflict and even violence, but argues that religious leaders have also made numerous efforts towards peacemaking by the use of various methods of diplomacy. She concludes that the new awareness of religious plurality that has emerged in some quarters during the past few decades has also contributed much to peacemaking by means of inter-religious dialogue.

In the fourth article, John Dupuche describes relations between religious traditions in Australia. After recognizing the exclusive attitude to other faith traditions held by the Catholic Church for many centuries, he explains the very different approach adopted by the same Church today. Many religious leaders now affirm that diversity is actually willed by God. Faith traditions can neither be reduced to an undefined commonality nor can they be dismissed, assimilated or condensed into a single form of expression. While it is true that, in Australia, the number of people subscribing to a particular religious denomination has diminished, many people embrace “hybridity and multiple identities” by belonging to more than one religious tradition. Australia is remarkable for its social harmony and for the fact that there are no religious or cultural ghettos or classes. The author is of the view that, of the four kinds of inter-religious dialogue,

the dialogue of religious experience can take us beyond the level of words into an evocative silence.

The final article, by Duncan Peters, presents a theological approach to the issue of religious diversity. The author provides various arguments to show that the one God can be conceived of in various ways. He argues that Christians and Muslims do not worship different Gods and states that ‘mainstream’ Christianity is a truly monotheistic faith. Moreover, he suggests that a fruitful line of enquiry regarding the identity of Jesus Christ might be to trace the journey of the earliest monotheistic Jewish disciples, asking *what* they came to believe about Jesus Christ and *why*. Various clarifications can be found to explain their use of the phrase ‘Son of God’ for Jesus Christ and their belief in a Triune God. Finally, the author explains how the various theophanies that exist in the Hebrew Bible can shed light on the Christian belief in the presence and power of God that was so clearly manifested in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. ■

Vision

Respectful and critical discussion of issues related to religion and philosophy will lead to a deeper appreciation and understanding of different religions in the world and promote peace among people.

Mission

To provide a forum for the discussion of critical issues related to religion and philosophy with a special focus on South Asia.

Aims and Objectives

To encourage a profound and more regular exchange of ideas on the subject of religion and philosophy, particularly on South Asia and to publish original articles selected through a peer review process.

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