

RELIGIONS BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES

Dr M.D. Thomas

Can Religion be conceived as a reality beyond the boundaries? That is a major question, and seems to be fundamental. Religion sets the boundaries. This is what we often see around us. It unites also, but within a limited scope. Often the boundaries appear to be so intact that one gets an impression that each unit is a complete world by itself on either side of the boundaries. But are these boundaries real? Are they permanent? Are they absolute? Isn't that religion proper is beyond the boundaries?

George Bernard Shaw, the great world thinker, says, 'if one really wants to do anything in life, one should have a religion'. Obviously, he doesn't refer to the ritual performances and mythical beliefs the popular religion is overloaded with. What he means is 'that which motivates one to do things in life' is religion proper. That is to say, religion is the motivating force in life; it inclines, orientates and creates a commitment in one as regards ulterior values in life.

Religion is like a ladder, which leads one to spiritual heights in life. It has various levels. Ritual performances are found at the lowest rung. Then come the mythical stories and beliefs. The realm of theology, doctrine and discipline works further. Spiritual experiences are attained still beyond. The real fruit of the religion is reflected in the practice of religious values, which brings spiritual quality to human life. The above rungs of the religious ladders are common to all traditions, in more or less degrees. It is in this ascending process that the real religion evolves and that, I suppose, is religion beyond the boundaries.

Religious traditions can no longer afford to exist like islands that are unrelated to each other. They cannot pretend to travel alone as parallel lines, which do not meet each other. This is all the more true in the fast changing scenario of the world today. Religious communities have to go much deeper in the understanding of one's own religious tenets. The genius of each religious tradition is to be highlighted. Universal spiritual values of the different traditions have to meet. The fruit of the religious practices has to emerge with a social commitment in life. Religions have to travel a joint journey across the barriers.

Religious following has to grow to a broader perspective of religion. *The social dimensions of the diverse religious persuasions have to be emphasized.* The essence of the non-religious ideologies needs to be incorporated, too. While being firmly rooted in the singular characteristics of one's own religious tradition, one has to rise beyond its set boundaries, in order to reach up to the wider horizons of the religious

phenomenon. The superior half of the religious experience is in store beyond the boundaries of the individual religious traditions. Only in mutual interaction and co-operation religions can realize this ulterior dream in life. Commitment to the higher portion of religion, in a spirit of harmony among all religious affiliations, is the real pursuit of the Divine in life. That which really fulfills the yearning of the human heart is 'religion beyond the boundaries'.

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