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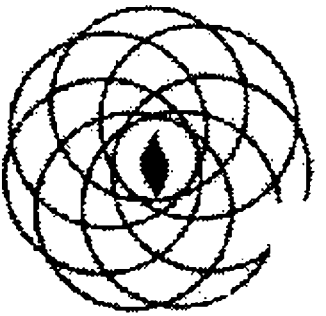

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The Editor, *Jnanadeepa*, Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune 411 014, India
Tel (office): +91-20-41026364,
(res): +91-20-41036111.
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Editorial

The genial atheist philosopher Daniel Dennett once talked of Darwin's idea of evolution as a universal acid so corrosive that it would eat through anything, including the container in which it is kept.[1] What he did not say is that if acid is a chemical compound, Darwin's idea is merely one of the components that go into the making of that compound; the real acid is the ideology that goes into the making of the modern outlook. Both these factors –that modernity is a compound and that it has a corrosive influence on traditions—are important for understanding the nature of this universal acid.

The following could be considered some of the factors that go into the making of this compound: the scientific revolution and the technological power it gave for the control of nature, the Protestant revolution and the breakup of Western Christendom coinciding with the birth of nation states, European renaissance with its insistence on returning to the pre-Christian humanistic traditions of the ancient Greece and Rome, the French revolution with its slogan of liberty, equality, and fraternity that would be the harbinger to many other revolutions challenging feudalistic, hierarchical societies to dream of egalitarian social structures, loosening of social and familial bonds in rural settings to free-floating atomistic and faceless individuals in urban settings where each is free to follows one's own star, the change from sustenance based agrarian economies to market oriented capitalist economies. Together they brought about the drastic changes that go under the name of modernity.

With the faster and faster means of travel and communication made possible by science and technology, the turbulent winds of modernity began to blow from one place to another and this explains the second feature of modernity, i.e., its universal corrosive features. Such globalization implies that no culture or tradition can remain unaffected by, or indifferent to, it. It has affected our understanding of practically everything: of who we are, our place in the world, our

understanding of God, the nature of the world, how we relate to other persons, etc.

That modernity is a compound of different elements implies that they could be combined in different ways to yield a variety of modernities rather than modernity in the singular. Thus, there is an Indian modernity, a Chinese modernity, an American modernity, a European modernity, and so on, each of which is different from the others, giving to each a unique character. Charles Taylor compares this process to the conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity or the conversion of Indonesia to Islam. The first implicated Roman Christianity inextricably with Greek philosophy whereas the second gave to Indonesian Islam its unique features.[2]

Precisely because of the pluriform character of modernity, its impact has been varied too. "Varied" is perhaps too mild a term for the manifold inner contradictions engendered by it. While it has created a secular culture that seeks to confine religion to the privacy of one's home, it has also contributed to the making of contemporary religious fundamentalisms.[3] On the one hand it extols human dignity and on the other hand, it commodifies the poor and the helpless; while the modern world is the most prosperous in history in economic terms, it is also the world where millions die of starvation; the modern world longs for world peace and wages the most horrendous wars known to our race.

This volume of *Jnanadeepa* was planned as an exercise in understanding the present state of affairs, especially with regard to religion, Christian theology, and contemporary India. But due to unforeseen circumstances, the Indian component has turned out to be much less than was planned. The article by Behura and Kar on Gandhi's critique of modernity is the only one that focuses explicitly on India. Ponniah's "Religion Meets Modernity," though not exclusively focussed on India, has enough reference to the Indian situation. In talking about the influence of modernity on India, it is to be kept in mind that the influence has not been a one way process, as Taylor's analogy of the religious conversions of Rome and Indonesia makes clear. This is all the more significant for understanding contemporary India. Moreover, we must be cautious in speaking about India as one monolith. While India has very long history, the

idea of India as a single nation state is itself a product of modernity. While it boasts of an egalitarian constitution and democratic governance, large parts of it are still governed by feudal norms that can even put people to death, for no crime other than falling in love with someone of another caste. While it boasts of its secularism, political mobilization along religious lines is rampant. One can go on and on with the underlying contradictions of contemporary India, but it is not hard to see that these are only a local reflection of the inherent contradictions of modernity pointed out earlier.

As far as understanding the impact of modernity on religion is concerned, it must be kept in mind that if "modernity" is pluriform by its very nature, the term "religion" is ambivalent to the extreme. This is understandable when we consider that the word "religion" applies to some of the most diverse phenomena, from the impersonal, mechanical rituals to control cosmic forces and/or to curry favour with deities (as in Purva Mimamsa) to the most personal and passionate outpourings of the spirit found in the mysticism of Mirabai. It goes without saying that these Indian examples have their counterparts all over the world. The implication is that it leaves more than adequate room interpreting religion in the way one chooses, as the modern thinkers did.

Understanding the impact of modernity on Christian theology in particular, we see that besides the already mentioned Protestant revolution and the accompanying changes, modernity drastically changed the Christian understanding of God, world, and the human person. While traditional Christianity saw God as a creator who is present and active in the whole creation (immanent) without being identical with it (transcendent), the typical modern God is a deistic one, rationally required to explain the origins of the world, but otherwise absent in its workings. As the place of divine presence and activity, Christians saw the footprints of God everywhere whereas the moderns saw the world as a machine functioning on its mechanical laws. Similarly human persons were no longer the crown of creation stamped with the image of God upon them, but a product of blind natural processes, to be manipulated like the rest of this mechanical nature. Human life was no longer a journey to God as Christian spirituality understood it, or a "being-in-becoming" as the classical

Greek philosophers held, but merely a being with no *telos*.[4] And the essence of this being was up for grabs.

Given such drastic change in outlook, it is not surprising that Christians were a confused lot in their response to modernity. Modernity was opposed tooth and nail, but it could not remain unaffected by it, sometimes contrary to Christianity's own self-understanding. Just to take one example, the Neo-Thomism that emerged in response to modernity unwittingly bought into the deistic view of the world when it imagined a pure nature on which the supernatural was superimposed as a gift from the outside.[5] It took the heroic efforts of Henri de Lubac to affirm that pure nature is only imaginary and the real world is suffused with grace. This, among other things, prepares for the way for Vatican II. One could give other examples, but an editorial is hardly the place for details.

Perhaps the best gain of modernity for the believers is the emerging realization that theological truths and scriptural descriptions are not to be treated on a par with scientific theories and empirical descriptions. This is pointed out in Tanner's article. But this lesson is yet to be digested as can be seen from those who seek to place creationism on a par with evolution, the attempts to hand over Christ of faith to Jesus of history, and so on. If such confusions are to be avoided much work remains to be done to explore the differences between scientific and theological truths before they can be integrated into a coherent worldview within which scientifically informed theological investigations can be conducted without falling prey to scientism.[6]

The Papers

The first two papers are brief and introductory. Norman Tanner's article provides a unique, panoramic view of Church history. His comparison of Vatican II with earlier councils is enlightening. John Karuvelil's introductory article, originally a part of his article on the developments in moral theology included in this volume, is presented separately in the beginning (with the author's permission) for the clarity it provides on the idea of modernity and the four different stages of responses of the Catholic Church to modernity. The

foregoing considerations should help us to understand why this relationship has been as ambivalent as it has been.

After these two articles that introduce modernity and its impact on Catholic faith, Nishant's article continues the historical narrative. He narrates the factors leading to the emergence of postmodernism, seeking to benefit from it and wondering how its inconsistencies might be kept at bay. Ponniah narrates the multiple interests and ideological compulsions that have shaped the interaction between modernity and religion, with a special eye on India. He shows that religious reasoning enters into how we negotiate social and cultural changes. Padinjarekuttu provides a comprehensive view of modernity and how it offers an opportunity for Christian faith. He points out some of the intellectual challenges that need to be met if Christianity is to re-invent itself. The other articles tell the stories of individual modern developments. Paramthottu presents a Taylorian perspective on the development of modern self. As one of the best known philosophers of modernity, Charles Taylor has a lot to teach us about the cultural influence in the making of modernity, and the emergence of modern self. His magnum opus on the emergence of the secular age is not covered for lack of space. John Karuvelil presents a picture of the flourishing of moral theology in the Catholic Church in the wake of modernity and Vatican II. Karl Rahner is perhaps the foremost among Catholic theologians who has struggled the most to reconcile modernity and Catholic faith. D'Lima narrates some of his struggles. Gandhi remains one of the best known critics of modernity before the emergence of the postmodern critics. Behura and Kar provide a brief look into his critique and his motivation for doing so. The last article by Malipurathu is comparable to Karuvelil's article inasmuch as both provide panoramic overview of their respective fields. No one, except specialists in bibilical studies, can fail to benefit from the wealth of information found in this article on how the study of the Bible has been affected by the modern changes.

George Karuvelil, SJ
Chief Editor

Notes :

1. Daniel Dennet, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meaning of Life* (London/New York: Penguin, 1996), 63.

2. Charles Taylor, "Two Theories of Modernity" in Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, *Alternative Modernities*, A Millennial Quartet Book (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 172-196.

3. Karen Armstrong has called this trend as "embattled forms of spirituality". See, Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2000), 6.

4. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

5. Gerard Loughlin, "*Nouvelle Théologie:* A Return to Modernism?," in *Ressourcement : A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth Century Catholic Theology*, ed. Gabriel Flynn and P. D. Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 46.

6. An initial exploration of their differences can be seen in George Karuvelil, "Science of Religion and Theology: An Existential Approach," *Zygon: Journal of Religion & Science* 47, no. 2 (2012), 415-37.