

## **Science and Religion in Dialogue**

The context of the reflection on science and religion is very contemporary. Science is growing, at a mind boggling speed. Religion in some of its external manifestations, though not always in the conventional modes, is growing and getting rooted in the every day life of every nation and individual. Unfortunately, humanity does not grow on par with these developments. Happiness, peace and development, which are essentially the goals of both science and religion, are becoming more and more distant. Hence, the question arises: can religion and science get into a dialogue and create a new interface that can create a better humanity, a more just universe?

The growth of science is there for everyone to see. What is new, perhaps, would be the phenomenal nature of this growth. Propelled particularly by Biotechnology and Information Technology, scientific fantasies, which could be realities tomorrow, visualize the possibility of extending and manipulating life in innumerable ways. It is as though man can play God.

Religion too is growing in its external manifestations. There are more places of worship. More people are frequenting religious centres. Economic prosperity of religious and worship centres has grown. And most importantly, the economic and political clout of the religious groups has become public and outspoken.

The unfortunate thing in all these is the fact that human beings are not growing. There are extreme levels of de-humanization, in which both religion and science are deeply involved. In their original pursuits, both religion and science vouch for the well-being of the human being. Then how has this deterioration occurred, is a question that should bother every thinking citizen and most importantly the social scientist. This enquiry becomes all the more important in the context of increasing religion-sponsored terrorism in the world.

From a Christian historical perspective scholars agree that the interaction between religion and science has gone through three distinct stages of encouragement, estrangement and engagement. In the encouragement stage, many religious people, including clerics, contributed substantially to the growth of science. Some of the clerics themselves were brilliant scientists who influenced history. The second stage of estrangement is, however, more known and had such outrageous cruelties as was shown in the case of Galileo. Luckily, the third stage is

emerging: the stage of active and constructive engagement. This is the stage that is emerging and has to emerge. Here, the rational, inquisitive and the systematic approach of science is to engage with the faith and commitment of religion.

Hinduism has shown a streak of scientific fantasy, some of which has indeed become reality. Other religious traditions too have streaks of scientific thinking that aver the value of science and scientific attitude to life.

Religion as practiced the world over creates immense problems for those concerned about a dialogue between science and religion. Most religions as seen to be practiced do not at all communicate any great amount of rationality, empathy or humanity. With increasing fundamentalist tendencies and terrorism based on fundamentalist beliefs, it would be very difficult to convince people that something good can come out of religion.

Yet the fact remains that both religion and science are powerful social realities with immense influence on human living. Hence, one must find ways of creating a new dialogue and build a new interface between science and religion. In fact, such a dialogue must begin with mutual respect for the respective domains of their operation. There is continuity that should be seen and accepted. And most important there is a clarity on life which can emerge from a combined introspection and enquiry that both science and religion should do together. Sociology of Religion, as a discipline, can probably contribute substantially in this context.

As one of the proponents of religion-science dialogue put it, if science and religion are to serve humanity, it is incumbent on them that they enter into a reasonable, responsible and realistic dialogue.

**Chief Editor**