

Further thoughts on interfaith dialogue

Nostra aetate the Vatican ii document on the Church's relation to the non-Christian religions of the world stated: 'The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and the doctrines which, although differing in many way from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men'.

Sadly many of my fellow Christians and priests (and Bishops) are so rooted in the established order they feel insecure with this statement: And yet did not Jesus draw attention to the holiness of the good Samaritan, the faith of the Roman centurion, and indeed the goodness of others not of his fold.

For me personally the sense of holiness in the great Religions of the world has led me to a deeper conversion within my own. I have for many years been inspired by what I have discovered within the different traditions of Buddhism which I have over the years integrated into my own faith and contemplative life.

Some will argue that in Buddhism there is no God. Zen speaks of 'beginningless' time, rather than the first moment of creation or a creator God. Some will equate Nirvana with the Godhead the Ultimate reality which all the great monotheistic Religions such as Christianity, Judaism and Islam; Zen Buddhists will have no great objections to this. They will insist that the Absolute Essence from which all things arise is beyond word or concepts.

So the Church encourages to seek wisdom and goodness wherever it can be found. Many Buddhists are deeply interested in Christianity, especially the deep contemplative tradition of the mystics. The Dalai

Lama has shared in many inter faith dialogues, especially with Catholic Christians.

Eastern meditation from Yoga to Zen attaches great importance on the body and the breathing. We Christians were influenced (some would say contaminated) by a neo platonian rejection of the material world, and yet Jesus was very conscious of the holiness of the world around him. ‘Consider the lilies of the field’ he said (Mt 6.280). Here Jesus is pointing to the material world.

And yet over the years modern Christians have neglected the bodily dimension of their prayer and spiritual lives. It has remained hopelessly underdeveloped.

I have for many years we have been drawn to the religions of the East to regain this balance of body and spirit.

Let us consider this now in a practical way and begin with the breath.

The Way of the Breath

Life is a matter of breathing. But we never think about it unless we can't breathe, then we do! Our breathing is closely linked to our emotions and feelings. When we are fearful our breathing is fast and anxious, when we are content it is calm. We are worried our whole body is affected so we see body and mind are intimately connected.

For our purpose our breathing needs to be slow and gentle. Always through the nose. We slightly lengthen the out breath when we breath and simply observe this rhythm.

Correct breathing is abdominal. As we breathe we feel the abdomen rise and gently fall. This is known as the tanden a point of power and strength. The practice is just to be aware of your breathing.