

Is there an Eternal Religion?

When great civilizations utterly foreign to each other, come into direct contact, it seems there can only be conflict. History bears this out. The great religions of the world have not been able to live in peace. Today we live side by side with cultures and religions we would never have encountered in the past. I believe there will never be world peace until there is a mutual respect and peace among all the great religions of the world. You might expect that anyone truly following a spiritual path and religious tradition would be a peace maker. But sadly this is not the case. Cultural and spiritual dialogue has never been more necessary than it is today. True dialogue demands openness and a willingness to be touched and even transformed by what we can learn from other cultures and religious traditions. We live in what is called a 'multicultural society', but we are not sure how to live alongside ways and values that are foreign to us. Many people today blame religion for all the conflicts in the world. I think this is true and untrue. True in that some religious practice is closed to any viewpoint, or way of life that does not correspond with a particular set of teachings. This gives rise to extreme fundamentalism. It is untrue because the problems of the world are not all caused by the world's religions.

Where then is true religion to be found? We cannot simply say, 'my faith is the true faith', because that is the end of any true dialogue.. The eternal religion is to be found in all true religions. It is the reality behind the rites, the truth behind all the dogmas, it is the justice behind all the laws. But it is also to be found in the depths of the heart of every human being – it is the law 'written on their hearts' (Romans 2.15) It is the treasure hidden in the field, the pearl of great price. (Matthew 13.46)

We must be willing to learn from all the great religions of the world and from all the ancient wisdom of the world. We have much to learn from Asia, from tribal religions, from the deep insights of the American Indians. All these peoples and cultures have been suppressed and sometimes eliminated by Western influences. They all bear within them ancient wisdom, the source from which all true religion springs.

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