

The Good Heart: A Buddhist Perspective on the Teachings of Jesus

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This book shows the Dalai Lama's remarkable capacity to address diverse audiences at just the right level. Here, speaking to and with Roman Catholic meditators in the John Main Seminar of 1994, he responds to passages from the Gospels that evoke somewhat similar passages from the Buddhist scriptures. The virtues advocated are quite similar. Jesus was "a fully enlightened being or a bodhisattva" (p. 83). Nevertheless, Buddhism and Christianity are deeply different in their metaphysics. The Buddhist principle of interdependence makes it "almost impossible to have any room for an atemporal, eternal, absolute truth. Nor is it possible to accommodate the concept of a divine Creation" (p. 82). This reviewer wishes that a Christian respondent had pointed out that the doctrines that so sharply contrast with Buddhism are not in the Bible. When Christian scripture is read with the vision of interconnectedness in mind, instead of conventional philosophical theism, its faith in God does not violate this Buddhist vision in the way most theology has done. In any case, the Dalai Lama does not discredit Christian teaching but seeks to understand and affirm its spiritual power. Diverse temperaments and personalities need diverse traditions.

A difference that is almost absent from these conversations is the attitude toward history. History is much more important to the Bible and to most Christians than to the Buddhist scriptures and most Buddhists, a difference related to the centrality and absence of God. However, the Gospel passages selected do not bring this out, nor do the Catholic meditators. There are other differences that do come through clearly but are not emphasized by the Dalai Lama as differences. E.g., he finds Jesus' call to love enemies quite similar to Buddhist teaching, but, in order to attain the needed impartiality toward all creatures, effective meditational techniques are needed. These are described in Buddhist scriptures but not in the Bible. Because the audience for these remarks consisted of persons who practice meditation, this difference is not highlighted in these conversations, but most Christians understand faith, not meditation, as the requirement for love, including love of the enemy. The Dalai Lama notes the important place of faith in Buddhism also, but this faith is grounded in reason and leads to further analytic reason, which leads to liberation.

In addition to the translated transcription of the Dalai Lama's talks and the questions and comments of the other seminar

participants, the book includes glossaries of Christian and Buddhist terms and introductions to Christianity and Buddhism. It can be an excellent text for dialogue groups that are ready to venture beyond the first stages of mutual acquaintance. The spirit shown by all participants in these conversations is ideal for authentic dialogue. Our generation is fortunate to have a spiritual teacher of the stature of the Dalai Lama in its midst.