

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

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His Holiness the Dalai Lama was invited by the World Community for Christian Meditation in London to comment on eight passages from the Gospels at their yearly John Main Seminar. Two passages were chosen from each Gospel, to represent the particular style of the writers: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Although these scriptures were unfamiliar to the Dalai Lama, one participant said later, "Your intuitive wisdom and sense of truth, trained in Buddhism, enables you to see very deeply and very clearly into many of the truths of our Scriptures and to reveal them to us in a new way." This book is a record of the historic interfaith encounter.

The Gospel passages are given at the head of each section, and are followed by the Dalai Lama's commentary. He weaves Buddhist and Christian teachings together in a gentle and compassionate way, never trying to make them the same, never stressing one over the other. His teachings shed an extraordinary light on passages which Christians probably know by heart, and yet have never understood so clearly. Perhaps the most exceptional is the teaching on the Resurrection and Ascension, which he develops into a cosmic dimension. It moved many to tears. As Father Laurence Freeman said, when thanking the Dalai Lama, "You used your strength of wisdom, insight, intelligence, and spiritual power with wonderful delicacy.... I felt you were using language, thought, and imagery that combined our cultures and brought us to the limit of language."

There is an excellent introduction by Freeman, which outlines the aims of the seminar. Speaking of meditation as a way of faith, he says, "Because we were meditating together three times a day, it was possible for the Dalai Lama's commentaries on the Gospels to be delivered and shared in an atmosphere of a common faith." Freeman adds that these periods of silence were crucial to the success of the experiment. That the Dalai Lama agreed was shown by his attending the early morning meditation each day, after which he had to return to his residence for breakfast, and then make the same long journey back for the first session an hour later.

Throughout the book there is insistence on the variety of religious traditions. The Dalai Lama stresses that we should be careful not to reduce everything to a set of common terms, so that there is no longer a distinction between the ways. He says, "I firmly believe that at a very profound level there is value in the distinctness and uniqueness of these different approaches." However, when asked whether he thought it would be beneficial for people from different faiths to go on a pilgrimage together, he replies that this is a project he has been working on, and he believes that this practice would have "tremendous benefit."

This is a book of very profound wisdom and tenderness, and should be of interest to all who seek to further their understanding of the spiritual world.