



The World Community for Christian Meditation

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The Dalai Lama website publishes story on the Day of Dialogue

* The text below is from the Office of HH the Dalai Lama

Dialogue between His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Fr Laurence Freeman OSB about Teacher and Disciple in Sarnath, Varanasi

January 13th 2013

Sarnath, Uttar Pradesh, India, 12 January 2013 - Today was dedicated to a conversation between His Holiness the Dalai Lama and his longstanding spiritual friend Fr Laurence Freeman, Director of the World Community for Christian Meditation. The theme was seeing Jesus and the Buddha as teachers and the role of the disciple. The venue was the Atisha Hall of the Central University of Tibetan Studies in Sarnath.

The conversation began during a private meeting between His Holiness and Fr Laurence and some of his friends and benefactors. One of them asked about truth and His Holiness replied,

?Once you are familiar with the truth, it has an effect on your mind. In his own teachings the Buddha described reality in different ways because of different dispositions and temperaments among his followers. When Christians and Buddhists come together we can say we have two versions of the truth, if a Muslim joins us there are three.?

Asked whether religion is necessary he said,

?Religion is a kind of instrument for transforming our minds into something positive. Everyone wants to be happy and here in the twenty-first century material facilities are highly developed. Indeed since there are still so many poor people we need to have material development. However, a great deal depends on our becoming aware of the limits of material values and our beginning to look inward. So far material development by itself has failed to produce a happy society.

?Before an audience of about 250 in the larger hall, Fr Laurence opened the conversation by recalling an earlier occasion when he invited His Holiness to comment on passages from the gospels,

?We were deeply touched by your handling of our sacred words and your insight into the truth of the gospels. It took a lot of courage.?

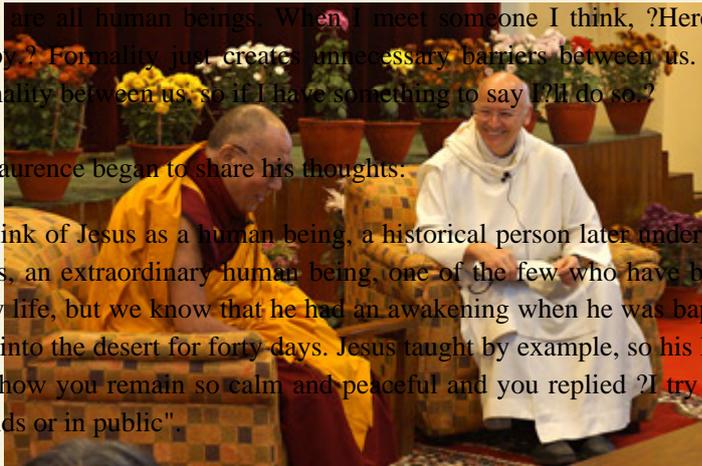
His Holiness replied,

?I found there were ideas in common with Buddhist teaching and it made for a very good meeting. After that you came with friends to Bodhgaya, and for the first time Buddhists and Christians prayed together under the Bodhi tree.?

Fr Laurence explained that he would speak about Jesus and how he relates to him as a teacher and then His Holiness

would speak about how he views the Buddha. He invited His Holiness to interrupt him if he liked, which drew the following response:

"We are all human beings. When I meet someone I think, 'Here's another human being who like me wants to be happy.' Formality just creates unnecessary barriers between us. As members of one human family we don't need formality between us, so if I have something to say I'll do so."



Fr Laurence began to share his thoughts:

"I think of Jesus as a human being, a historical person later understood as the Son of God. I relate to him as a natural Jesus, an extraordinary human being, one of the few who have become universal teachers. We know little about his early life, but we know that he had an awakening when he was baptised by John the Baptist and that the spirit of it led him into the desert for forty days. Jesus taught by example, so his life is consistent with his teaching. I asked you years ago how you remain so calm and peaceful and you replied 'I try to be the same on my own as when I'm with close friends or in public'."

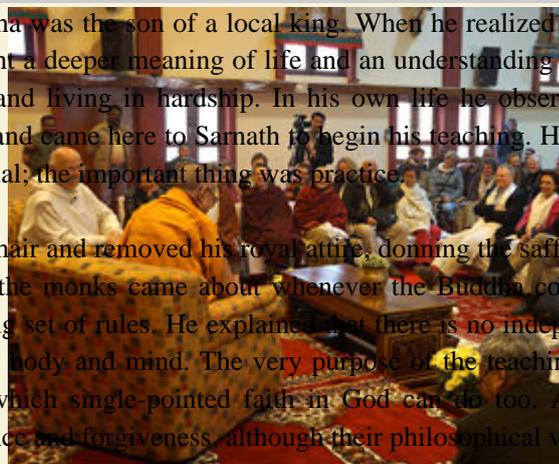
"Jesus is a model for how to live my life. I consider him a universal teacher, a person of integrity with natural authority who embodies the truth. He's someone in whom I can take refuge with trust and confidence. My relationship with Jesus straightens me out."

He remarked that there seems to be a correspondence between the Christian idea that everyone is created in the image of God and Buddha nature. When he experiences Christ within, he sees him reflected in other people he meets.

"Jesus is a medicine, a physician, not a judge; someone who brings healing to the world. He's a teacher, a leader and a way. Because of that I feel I can live my life with meaning."

"Wonderful, wonderful, that's really my own understanding of Jesus," His Holiness responded. "Through your own intelligent analysis you have reached an understanding that affects your life."

"All Buddhists accept that the Buddha was the son of a local king. When he realized that even for a prince life is full of problems and difficulties he sought a deeper meaning of life and an understanding of reality. He left the palace and spent six years meditating, fasting and living in hardship. In his own life he observed morality, concentration and wisdom. He attained enlightenment and came here to Sarnath to begin his teaching. He had no regard for social status, considering kings and beggars as equal; the important thing was practice."



"After leaving the palace, he cut his hair and removed his royal attire, donning the saffron robes of a monk. Apart from the principal precepts, the vows of the monks came about whenever the Buddha corrected mistakes the monks had made, he didn't declare a pre-existing set of rules. He explained that there is no independent self, but that the self is a mere designation on the basis of the body and mind. The very purpose of the teaching of the lack of an independent self is to reduce self-centredness, which single-pointed faith in God can do too. All our religions have the same message of love, compassion, tolerance and forgiveness, although their philosophical views are different."

Everyone took lunch together under a shamiana in the University grounds and discussions continued as people ate. On his way back to the meeting hall, His Holiness greeted several friends who had come to meet him, including visually challenged girls from the nearby Jeevan Jyoti Institute for the Disabled and their teachers, in whose welfare he takes a close interest. In the afternoon session, the focus was on what it means to be a disciple. Fr Laurence began again, noting that Jesus gathered his disciples together calling on them "Follow me." He said this image of a disciple is essential to Christian meaning and identity, but it also has a universal quality. A disciple has to be open, trusting and to tell the truth. The teacher is faithful to the disciple. This fidelity marks the teacher-disciple relationship. He affirmed that an authentic relationship with your teacher is the guiding light of your life.

His Holiness said that a teacher must have experience, especially inner spiritual experience. The important thing is that in following a teacher you become a calmer person. Both parties to the relationship have a responsibility, the teacher's

is to take care of the student, and the student's is to act with respect.

He remarked that we too often pay attention to appearances, like young women enhancing their external beauty with cosmetics, when what is important in our relationships is inner beauty. What follows from this is the inner peace that gives rise to happiness as individuals, as families and as communities. If we have that, when we face problems we can easily work them out between us. Inner peace brings strength.

A questioner asked if it is possible to be a follower of both Jesus and the Buddha. Fr Laurence commented that the Bible says we should take advice from every wise person, suggesting we accept truth wherever we find it. He quoted His Holiness as saying that it may be possible to be a Buddhist and a Christian for a while, but eventually you find yourself gravitating to one or the other. His Holiness concurred.

Someone else asked about Christians practising Buddhist meditation. His Holiness replied that there are many different methods for training the mind and it's possible to adopt such practices. You need to see what is most effective for you.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama meeting with his friends, the visually challenged girls from the Jeevan Jyoti Institute for the Disabled and their teachers in Samath, Uttar Pradesh, India, on January 12, 2013. Photo/Jeremy Russell/OHHDL

?The simple thing is that while we are still alive, we should lead a meaningful life from day to day. That means helping others wherever we can, but at least avoiding doing them harm. Then when death comes we will have no regret and can feel confident of going to heaven or to a good rebirth. This is what I do myself. Even in my dreams I remember that I am a Buddhist monk, never the Dalai Lama. If death comes tonight, I'll have no regrets and I hope this confidence will continue to prevail.?

Photographs were taken together, words of thanks were said and all the participants looked forward to when they will meet again.

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