

ONE WORLD – MANY PATHS TO PEACE
Interfaith Dialogue with the Dalai Lama
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Christian Perspective
By
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What an honour it is for me to represent the Christian Faith at this Interfaith Dialogue, “One World Many Paths to Peace”, in the presence of His Holiness, the Dalai Lama. We are so honoured by your presence with us, Your Holiness.

I am a Catholic Bishop. I understand that over the years you have had dialogue with many Catholic leaders – in fact, no less than with three Popes and several well known Catholic monks, including Thomas Merton and Laurence Freeman. You have become a real pioneer of peace making between our two different traditions. You are willing to meet with us, to talk with us, to learn from each other. For this we are so grateful.

You understand well that these encounters are new to both Buddhists and Christians. I believe that these encounters are forging a fruitful friendship between the both of us. Friendship is surely the ultimate answer to the misuse of religion as a false pretext for war and terror. If the perception is that religion only causes world problems and creates enemies, then friendship between us is an urgent priority.

But friendship cannot be forced upon anyone. There first must be a willingness to be friends.

For Catholics, this willingness has been expressed in more recent decades. Our Vatican II Council (1962-1965) opened the door to such dialogue when it stated that:

“Buddhism in its various forms testifies to the essential inadequacy of this changing world. It proposes a way of life by which men can, with confidence and trust, attain a state of perfect liberation and reach perfect illumination either through their own efforts or by the aid of divine help.” (*Nostra Aetate*, 1965, n.2)

So our willingness for friendship has been established. This is a great achievement in our times. Where do we go from here? How can different faith deepen friendship so that the one world of peace may flourish?

May I offer humbly a suggestion? It has three parts. (I am indebted to Fr Patrick O’Sullivan sj for this expression)

When power meets power, there is a power struggle.

When power meets vulnerability there is alienation.

When vulnerability meets vulnerability there is intimacy.

History is replete with examples of power struggles arising from individuals or communities, even religious communities, refusing to give way or make room for each other. Likewise, the alienation of vulnerable peoples when they meet the force of an advancing power can be devastating. For example, our own Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are witnesses to this. But when vulnerability in the human heart meets the vulnerability of another, the intimacy of a strong and constant friendship has a chance of growing. It is like a little seed that might just grow as tall and strong as a mighty Australian gum tree.

It is this latter type of encounter between us that may enable a friendship to grow that is worthy of our common humanity. It is a shared vulnerability that becomes a fertile soil enabling peace to grow and the flowers of mutual respect to bloom.

Are we strong enough to be vulnerable to each other?

Let me explain from a Christian point of view.

For us, friendship based on vulnerability is not sentimental or individualistic. It is strong and arises from the dignity of the human person who is made in the image and likeness of God. The foundation of all human rights arises from this union of the creator with the created. This type of friendship with God and each other condemns outright caricatures of itself as a reason for war or terrorist acts. It embraces the common good. Friendship is motivated by compassion. It works towards a global peace ethic based on solidarity with each other.

It is ready to see “the other” not as a threat but as a brother or sister who “completes” me. It desires that the poor and marginalised come into the centre of the circle of life. It is ready to forgive and show mercy. It acknowledges the beauty of all creation and strives to respect it.

Christians believe that the greatest form of vulnerability ever shown was the death of Jesus of Nazareth. The Crucified Jesus is our living symbol of the divine vulnerability that our loving and merciful God was prepared to make for us by sending His only Son, Jesus Christ, to die for us. Jesus gave himself up for us all. He took on all our vulnerabilities and weaknesses in everything, except sin. In profound humility, Jesus became for all time the “Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world”. In the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, and by the sending of His Holy Spirit upon us, true intimacy with God has been established. This is our Good News. Together with all religions and all men and women of good will, Christians desire to build continuously a culture of peace. This is the fruit of true friendship and it dispels the midnight of war and welcomes the dawn of peace.

This friendship is a work of justice. It builds and restores damaged or broken relationships with God, humans and the earth. It is a permanent task. It is the fruit of love. Its soul is compassion and mercy.

Given the fragile nature of the world today, global friendship is the medicine so badly needed. It is almost as if, please excuse this strange expression, we are “condemned” to friendship. Alternatives seem unthinkable. Buddhists and Christians, Muslims and Jews are well placed to continue to offer leadership in global friendship. Loving kindness is surely at the heart of all our religious traditions.

I conclude by offering a beautiful story that I believe originates from ancient Jewish texts. Understandably, over time many variations have arisen but this is the version that I have received. It is a story of a Jewish teacher who asks his students how they can tell when the night has gone and the dawn has arrived. One student suggests it is when you can look out and a person can be distinguished from a dog. Another suggests it is when you can look out and distinguish the difference between a house from a tree. But the theologian’s response was that the night has gone and the dawn has arrived when you can look into the eyes of another and say: “You are my brother; you are my sister”.

Your Holiness, the Dalai Lama, and Rabbi Jonathan Keren-Black and Professor Abdullah Saeed, I look at you today with eyes of loving kindness and I say: You are my dear brothers. Let us go forward together!