

[The Kingdom of God Is No Longer Within You](#)

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The Kingdom of God Is No Longer Within You

If you were a Catholic drawn into the Eastern traditions, perhaps practicing yoga or Zen meditations, your mystical introspection and self-inquiry would soon be outlawed by the Vatican. For the past three decades Catholics around the globe have engaged in a giant experiment with the many cultures of the world, embracing practices once considered anathema—non-Latin liturgy, guitar recitals instead of choir hymns and more. Since Vatican II (1962-65), much stress has been placed on dialog and interfaith efforts, and this has fostered an openness to philosophical matters, too, fueled by Rome's more open doctrine which said, in essence, that the Church recognizes truth and spirituality wheresoever it may be found.

While the doors were open, many things got in, to the delight of liberal Catholic seekers and the dismay of conservative theologians. Yoga classes was one (a Spanish religious, Mariano Ballester, was recently accused of organizing yoga courses in the Jesuit headquarters, 100 meters from St. Peter's Basilica); Eastern concepts of divine immanence was another. A number of Catholic thinkers and writers are teaching things the Vatican has called "dangerous and deviant." In April we reported that Dominican priest Michael Fox was silenced for his mystical writings, Meister Eckhart views and denial of original sin. In August we noted that Father Thomas Berry, a 74-year-old American Catholic is stressing the sacred and conscious nature of the natural universe and calling for a reverence for creation and all living creatures. This belief in "divine immanence" is officially condemned by the Church, but more and more members are finding it closer to the truth they intuit than the catechism of their youth. This is especially true in Europe.

The Rector of the University Pontificia Urbaniana, Indian Carmelite Daniel Acharuparambil, believes, "Oriental meditation is valid so long as it is used in a balanced way. We have not got a technique such as yoga that unites body and soul in Christian spirituality."

That may be so, but the Vatican fears too many such incursions have taken place. On August 14th it was announced that Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the same man who has been silencing American Catholic academics, will soon publish a document in which he prohibits the practice of yoga in the Catholic Church and urges the faithful to return to orthodox Christian prayer.

Cardinal Ratzinger is the Prefect of the Vatican's Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, formerly known as the Holy Office of Inquisition. His word is law; and his law affects almost one-fifth of the human family. For your ready reference, here is the editor's Pocket Guide to World Religious Demographics (Numbers rounded up for simplicity):

1 billion Catholics

1 billion Moslems

1 billion Hindus/Buddhists

1 billion Chinese

1 billion Other faiths/non-religious

.5 billion Protestant/Eastern Orthodox

5 billion + total humans

When Ratzinger's decree is issued, American nuns will no longer wear saffron robes or sit in the famed Lotus posture. Italian friars will have to abandon their

fascination with Zen philosophy and other Eastern mystical disciplines. Indian priests must renounce their morning hatha yoga regimen and stop teaching that God is within man, for which the customary Biblical justification is the oft-quoted Luke 17:21 - "Neither shall they say Lo here or Lo there. For behold, the kingdom of God is within you." If Ratzinger has his way, God will remain in His heaven and man will meet Him at death and not sooner.

We admire Cardinal Ratzinger's courage and agree with his basic premise that yoga, Zen and non-dual philosophies are not compatible with the basic principles of Catholicism. In these pages two years back [Nov. '86] and in personal missives sent to Rome, we urged the Pope to cease his inculturation programs among Hindus, and to ask his sisters and priests to stop wearing our sacred saffron robes, to stop reading from our scriptures, to stop using our holy symbols and practices and thus to stop confusing people with where Catholicism stops and Hinduism begins. We engaged in an impassioned exchange with those who defend such tactics, focusing on Father Bede Griffiths who has an "ashram" in South India, does puja instead of mass, wears the ochre vestments, uses the "Aum" symbol and calls himself "swami." Until now, he could and did say that his Church did not object. Perhaps our voice was heard, but more likely the Church felt this syncretic approach would only lead to the dilution of the values and beliefs that are unique to Saint Peter's tradition.

Years ago, according to Madras-based Swami Kulandaiswami, Thailand's Catholic priests tried a similar tactic, incorporating Buddhist rites, mantras and more into Catholic liturgy. It backfired. Buddhists vehemently objected, calling it "an insult to Buddhism." Decades ago the Catholic bishops of India at their National Center in Bangalore had figures of Brahma, Vishnu, Siva and the Nataraja displayed on window grills of their church. The Hindu Astheega Sangham took them to court and had the images removed. The plaintiff's attorney, Mr. Parasaran, argued, "If you wish to honor or respect Hindu deities, place them on your altars and not on your window sills."

When faced with tough issues such as these, Hindus are neurotic. I have seen Hindu leaders-men and women alike, of such strength and conviction they would welcome death before abandoning the Sanatana Dharma-turn to emotional and intellectual jello in the presence of a priest. A Moslem or Buddhist cannot elicit this response. There is an explanation for this. For many decades, and even today, the best and brightest of Hindu children were educated in Catholic schools. Their mentors, examples and friends were the kindly nuns and the erudite priests. They now find it hard to stand up for dharma in any dialogue, or even to consider that

they have reason to stand. This is a natural response. It is also a terribly debilitating one.

What will happen next? Will all the Catholics who learned yoga from Swami Satchidananda or SYDA give it up or become covert practitioners? Will syncretic Catholic ashrams bend to the Vatican's will or break off and start their own churches, like a French and American priest recently did? Stay tuned.