

[Vatican Condemns Hindu, Buddhist Religious Methods](#)

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The thirty-year excursion of Catholics into eastern thought appears to be rapidly drawing to a close. On December 14th, the Vatican's "Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith" issued a letter to the Church's 3,000 bishops warning of "dangers and errors" from "non-Christian forms of meditation." The letter, written by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and approved by Pope Paul II, says it is specifically concerned with "methods which are inspired by Hinduism and Buddhism, such as 'Zen,' 'Transcendental Meditation' or 'Yoga.'"

The document is mostly concerned with explaining and defending how and why eastern methods are incompatible with Catholic doctrine. In the process, eastern beliefs are dismissed as inadequate or false. Here are four examples: Meditation can imprison "the person praying in a spiritual privatism which is incapable of a free openness to the transcendent God." The Hindu concept of "absorbing of the human self into the divine self is never possible, not even in the highest states of grace." "All the aspirations which the prayer of other religions expressed are fulfilled in the reality of Christianity beyond all measure." "It is impossible to arrive at a perfect love of God if one ignores his giving of himself to us through [Jesus Christ]."

It remains to be seen how meditative and mystical influences are to be purged from the Church. There are literally hundreds of monasteries and convents and thousands of clergy actively involved in one form or another of eastern mysticism.

After the Vatican II council in the 1960s, many efforts were made to establish "dialogue" with non-Catholic religions, Catholics applauded what was "true and good" in those religions, and non-Catholics, especially Hindus, responded warmly to these overtures. Ratzinger's letter attests to the profound influence this dialogue has had on the Catholic Church. The Vatican's evaluation of that influence as malevolent and its harsh condemnation of eastern beliefs should effectively end the Catholic dialogue with Hindus and Buddhists. The initial reaction in California,

where one nun has an authentic Zendo, indicated a debate lied ahead.

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