

## **SOME THOUGHTS ON SCRIPTURE AND WORLD RELIGIONS**

**Where, then, is this eternal religion – the *santana dharma*, as the Hindus call it – to be found? It is to be found in every religion as its ground or source, but it is beyond all formulation. It is the reality behind all rites, the truths behind all dogmas, the justice behind all laws. But it is also to be found in the heart of every (person). It is the law ‘written on their hearts’. It is not known by sense or reason but by the experience of the soul in its depths.**

**Griffiths, Bede  
Return to the Center  
Templegate, 1977  
p. 98**

**I desire to conclude these reflections by turning our attention to two aspects of world religion. First, we are all in need of developing a profound respect for the religions of the world. I believe it is Hans Kung who pointed out that there would be no world peace without religious peace. Peace results from harmony. The religions of the world must mature to their full stature. Varying religious perspectives speak to the splendor of the divine manifested in and through what we perceive to be the human and the created. Second, our various religious traditions reflect surprising perspectives when they are proclaimed and appreciated from the viewpoints and experiences of people 'outside' the given tradition. A Buddhist commentary on the Gospel of John would provide reflections on John from the viewpoint of enlightenment and Buddha's Eightfold Path.**

**Religions react to the circumstances in which they find themselves. Ezra encouraged a 'cleansing' of the Exiles who returned to Judah after their captivity in Babylon (587-538 BCE). The 'cleansing' involved a condemnation of the practice of taking a 'foreign' wife. The Hebrew captives even married their captors! One would think that this was a testimony to the power of love to conquer hate but anger and hurt can**

**crush the human spirit Ezra's lament (see Ezra 9:1-10:44) is quite beautiful and stirring. Yet, the condemnation of his people who married foreign women is tragic. One would easily conclude that the return from Exile was a failure unless one read and pondered the Book of Ruth. Ruth is a 'foreign' woman whose lineage is crucial to the Davidic line. The author of the Book of Ruth presented Ruth as no less than heroic. The Scriptural position is anything but uniform. The tendency to exclude is challenged by the insight that God is the God of all.**

**Mark's harsh portrayal of the Syro-Phoenician woman is similar to the Ezra-Ruth conflict. Jesus alarmingly excluded the foreign woman from the community's blessings and table sharing. The woman demanded that her dignity be recognized as she pleaded for the crumbs that fell from the table. Jesus praised her courage. He did not respond to her because she 'converted' to him or his people's ideology. He recognized in her no less than the dignity of another person who is no less than a child of his God. I would suggest that our approach to other religions be one of respect and reception of the wisdom and example that can give to us.**

**The episode of the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5: 1-20) offers a stunning example of the openness of Jesus to the creativity of others. The cured man was empowered to formally teach the essence of the Judaism of Jesus without so much as a day of formal instruction. Jesus commissioned the man to proclaim the HESED (loving-kindness) of God to his own (Pagan) people. The man had only his experience to draw from. Jesus offered no control or review as to the content of his message. Such trust is unthinkable in the current ecclesial atmosphere. It requires little imagination to come to the conclusion that the healed man re-interpreted the Hesed in rather unique and creative terms.**

**Would we not benefit if we walked with Buddha, danced with Shiva, praised with Mohammed, danced with David, and loved with Tara as we walked on the highways and byways of life with Jesus? Only a thought!**

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