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Vatican and Yoga

Facts And Fictions

Devananda, Vishnu The Vatican has charged that practices of yoga and meditation could "degenerate into a cult of the body" and lead to "moral deviation". But how can going to a doctor for a physical exam "degenerate into a cult of the body?" Or, going to a psychologist or psychiatrist for analysis lead to "moral deviation?" Yoga includes among its disciplines practices to make the body and mind fit for prayer and meditation. The body and mind are treated as a vehicle to carry the aspirant to the goal of God-consciousness. If the vehicle breaks down, you cannot reach the destination.

The Vatican also warns that to give "symbolic significance" to sensations of well-being from meditation could lead to "a kind of mental schizophrenia which could also lead to psychic disturbance and, at times, to moral deviations." The practice of meditation helps to transcend identification with the body and senses, to remove the confusion and distraction of the mind and to commune with God.

To dismiss the experiences of meditation as insignificant and divorced from spiritual experience and discipline is like claiming that only Vatican water can quench your thirst and not water by any other name or form. God alone can quench the spiritual thirst of man, though people drink that experience of God-consciousness in many forms, giving it many names.

The Vatican cautions that such practices as yoga and meditation "can degenerate into a cult of the body and lead surreptitiously to considering all bodily sensations as spiritual experiences." But there is an interconnection between mind and body - like that of a horse and a cart. Just as the intelligent driver controls his cart by means of both brakes on the cart and reins for the horse, the intelligent spiritual

aspirant controls body and mind together with yoga postures and meditation.

All mystical experiences have a reaction in the body, just like every emotion has a reaction in the body. The devotional posture taken before the altar, as one bows his head in prayer, offers a physical and mental experience different from that of a soldier standing erect at attention. A mother's joy at holding her child, or any other expression of love, has its physical as well as mental and spiritual sensations. All mental sensations affect the physical body and vice versa.

The Vatican letter states that "the love of God, the sole object of Christian contemplation, is a reality which cannot be 'mastered' by any method or technique." But are not the prayers and meditations of all religions performed for the love of God? Just as the love of mother for child, and of child for mother, is common among Bushmen, Catholics, Muslims and all the peoples of just as the love of mother and child. But this love or devotion can manifest and be expressed in different ways. Every religious person practices love of God in his or her own way. God is pleased with all forms of devotion - just as a mother accepts any form of love coming from her child.

Many communist governments have recently burst apart, failing to force the minds of the people closed with guns and walls, and with mental barriers of fear and slogans. So also do religious groups fall into decline and burst apart when they attempt to enforce dogma at the cost of spiritual experience and spiritual progress. Let us not return to the days when Copernicus, Bruno and Galileo were persecuted as heretics - Bruno was even burned - for disagreeing with the Catholic doctrine that the earth was the center of the universe.

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