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Reflection

H.H. Dalai Lama

from **Gethsemani Encounter I, July 1996**

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It was a great source of happiness for me to join my Christian and Buddhist brothers and sisters in the Gethsemani Encounter. I was particularly pleased that we should meet at the monastery that was once home to Thomas Merton. Although we did not know each other very long, in his large-hearted faith and burning desire to know, I felt the inspiration of a kindred spirit.

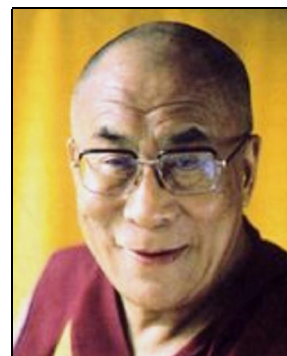
For those of us who attended, this gathering of dedicated monks, nuns, and lay spiritual practitioners was proof, if it were needed, that the purpose of religion is not to build beautiful churches or temples; it is to cultivate positive human qualities such as tolerance, generosity and love. Fundamental to Buddhism and Christianity, indeed to every major world religion, is the belief that we must reduce our selfishness and serve others.

Unfortunately, due to suspicion and misunderstanding, religion sometimes causes more quarrels than it solves. I believe that one religion, like a single type of food, cannot hope to satisfy all. Depending on their different mental dispositions, some people benefit from one teaching, others from another. All faiths, despite their contradictory philosophies, possess the ability to produce fine warmhearted human beings. Therefore, there is every reason to appreciate and respect all forms of spiritual practice.

Every religion and culture has its distinguishing characteristics. For Tibetans, the emphasis for many centuries has been on developing and upholding inner values such as compassion and wisdom. These are

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- **H. H. the Dalai Lama's Presentation (Gethsemani Encounter II, April 2002)**
- **H. H. the Dalai Lama: Discussion (Gethsemani Encounter II, April 2002)**
- **Book Review: Spiritual Advice for Buddhists and Christians (Bulletin 63, March 2000)**
- **Tribute to Thomas Merton (Bulletin 56, October 1996)**



His Holiness the fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, is the head of state and spiritual leader of the Tibetan people. He has been involved in interreligious dialogue through the Gethsemani

more important to us than acquiring material wealth, fame or success. We regard inner strength, gentleness, love, compassion, wisdom and a stable mind as the most important treasures a human being can collect in his or her lifetime. However, I am aware that this can lead to a kind of peaceful complacency. I feel that we Buddhists have much to learn from our Christian brothers and sisters. We are all aware of the inner peace that can be found in prayer and meditation, but our Christian friends may have a richer experience of bringing that inner peace to bear in practical ways in the generous service of others.

Gatherings of spiritual practitioners from different backgrounds, such as the Gethsemani Encounter, are of immense value. I believe it is extremely important that we extend our understanding of each other's spiritual practices and traditions. This is not necessarily done in order to adopt them ourselves, but to increase our opportunities for mutual respect. Sometimes, too, we encounter something in another tradition that helps us better appreciate something in our own. Consequently, I hope that Christians, Buddhists, people of all faiths and people without faith will approach . . . the Gethsemani Encounter with the same rigorous curiosity and courage for which Thomas Merton was renowned. It is my hope that [they] may find in it inspiration and understanding that in some way contribute to their own inner peace. And I pray that through inner peace they too will become better human beings and help create a happier, more peaceful world.

January 1997

Dharamsala, India.

Encounters and visits to India and the United States for many years.

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