

My Christian Faith & the Practice of Zen Buddhist Meditation

Kevin Thew Forrester

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As a Christian, I am deeply aware that I live and move and have my being in Christ – as does all creation. I am honored to be the bishop-elect of the Diocese of Northern Michigan with the opportunity to serve and work with the Episcopal Ministry Support Team as well as the people of the diocese for the next 10 to 15 years, committed as we are to the ministry of all the baptized.

Each of us is formed in the image and likeness of God. As a Christian, I owe my life to our Trinitarian faith. Over the years my faith and spiritual practice have been largely shaped and profoundly imprinted by the mystics and the contemplative spiritual tradition. I have grown in my awareness that the grace of God, which is God's very Presence, cannot be circumscribed. Because of my faith in the gracious goodness of the Godhead, I am open to receive the wisdom from, and be in dialogue with, other faith traditions; not to mention the sciences and the arts.

I am quite honored, as an Episcopal priest, to have been trained in the art and practice of Zen meditation. I am not an ordained Buddhist priest. I am an Episcopal priest eternally grateful for the truth, beauty and goodness, experienced in meditation. I am thankful for the pioneering work of Thomas Merton in the Buddhist-Christian dialogue. I am also thankful for the current elders in our Christian tradition, such as Thomas Keating and David Steindl-Rast, whose practice of meditation (like that of Merton) deepened their own contemplative life and led them to explore the sacramental common ground we share through the grace of God. As a Christian I can be receptive to divine truth, beauty and goodness, because I know that "All things come of Thee, O Lord; and of thine own have we given thee."

I have been blessed to practice Zen meditation for almost a decade. About five years ago a Buddhist community welcomed me as an Episcopal priest in my commitment to a meditation practice—a process known by some Buddhists as "lay ordination."

Literally thousands of Christians have been drawn to Zen Buddhism in particular because, distinct from western religions, it embodies a pragmatic philosophy and a focus on human suffering rather than a unique theology of God. "Lay ordination" has a different meaning in Buddhist practice than in the Christian tradition. The essence of this welcoming ceremony, which included no oaths, was my resolve to use the practice of meditation as a path to awakening to the truth of the reality of human suffering. Meditation deepens my dwelling in Christ.

My experience continues to be that through the grace of meditation I am drawn ever deeper into the Trinitarian contemplative Christian tradition. I have been able to bring the practice of meditation/contemplation to the wider diocese through the gifts discovery process and through the founding of the Healing Arts Center at St. Paul's in Marquette. The Center is devoted to assisting people in their own spiritual journey, which includes the practice of meditation within the sanctuary and the exploration of Christian contemplatives and mystics.