

What's So Funny about Peace, Love and Understanding?

by Elizabeth DiNovella via rialator - The Progressive *Saturday, May 12 2007, 11:10pm*

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When it was announced that the Dalai Lama was coming to Madison in May, a few of my friends snatched up the pricey tickets right away. I had heard the Dalai Lama speak five years ago during his last visit, and it was so difficult to hear him that I decided to stay out of the ticket-buying frenzy this time around. But when a friend of mine (a Maoist no less!) called me last Friday morning to offer me free tickets to the public talk that afternoon, I couldn't resist.

The Dalai Lama's speech, "Compassion: The Source of Happiness," touched on many topics. But what really struck me was his take on secularism. He said some people think moral ethics must be based on religious faith. But we must be able to promote human values, such as compassion, forgiveness, and tolerance, without talking about religion. Many people think secularism is a rejection of religion, he said, but it can mean respect to all religions and to non-believers. So there you go, a Buddhist monk sounding the horn for secularism.

At the end of his talk, he responded to questions submitted by the audience. The last question asked if he was optimistic, what with all the violence and terrorism in the world. "Yes, I am optimistic," he said. The desire for peace is strong nearly everywhere. "Since the Iraq War, many people in U.S. think using force" is not a good idea, he said.

"Many problems we face are man-made," he added, so it follows logically that we must have the ability to solve these problems.

"The twentieth century was a century of violence," he said, with "more suffering, complications and division." But the twenty-first century can be a century of disarmament. "We must find solutions through peaceful means," the Dalai Lama said. "This century will be more peaceful, more compassionate, more patient, I think."

A few hours later I was walking in my neighborhood and bumped into a friend of mine. I told him how much I enjoyed the Dalai Lama's talk. Unsurprisingly, this pal proceeded to bring up the CIA's funding of Tibet fighters [1]. Nothing like an angry leftist to take the joy out of seeing the Dalai Lama.

This wasn't the first time an activist friend had brought up that critique of the Dalai Lama. I remember hearing the same thing when he visited Madison five years ago. I'm not sure where this negative and almost visceral reaction stems from. Maybe it stems from the intolerance of too many self-avowed secularists to anything religious.

I have no idea if the CIA is continuing to fund Tibetan groups. But it seems like Congress has no idea either. The Washington Post [2] reports that the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence said the CIA violated the law last year when it failed to report covert activity.

Unfortunately, intolerance rages just about everywhere. Believers and non-believers too often mirror each other in that regard.

The May issue of Glamour [3] magazine includes an interview with Mariane Pearl, the widow of slain Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl. A movie based on her book "A Mighty Heart" will hit theaters in June. In the interview, she's called "a clear voice of tolerance and dialogue" for how well she handled herself after Daniel was murdered by Islamic extremists in Pakistan in 2002. Mariane Pearl responds: "Well, that kind of self-control . . . hasn't been easy for me. I always go back to one moment: In Karachi, when Captain [the Pakistani officer who was leading the investigation into Danny's kidnapping] came to the house and told me what happened, my reaction was that I grabbed an AK-47 from one of the guards. In that single moment, I knew how easy it would be to kill someone. If they had brought a person who was guilty [of Danny's murder] to the house, I would have shot him. But then I would have destroyed everything Danny believed in, and everything we did as a couple—and I couldn't do that. Putting that gun down was my biggest act of courage."

Where, she is asked, does that strength come from?

Mariane replies: "Partly from Buddhism. I've been practicing since I was 17. And, you know, after Danny's death, all the years of chanting kicked in, and I knew instinctively that anger and revenge wouldn't take me anywhere. It doesn't mean it doesn't hurt, though. I miss Danny. The pain is real, but the sense of purpose is bigger than the pain."

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