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The Good Heart

Dalai Lama

The GOOD HEART

HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA

Foreword, Introduction and Christian Context by
Laurence Freeman, OSB

Translated from the Tibetan and Annotated by
Geshe Thupten Jinpa

Edited and with a Preface by
Robert Kiely

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FOREWORD

The heart can be an overworked religious symbol. Yet there is no better universal term to convey not merely the interiority but the wholeness of the human person. It also expresses that common ground of the human family in which each person reaches the fullness we can call either enlightenment or salvation.

Since *The Good Heart* first appeared it has contributed very meaningfully, in the many languages in which it now exists, to making more people conscious of the common ground of religion and culture. The John Main Seminar of 1994, in which the Dalai Lama bravely accepted the invitation of The World Community for Christian Meditation to comment on the Gospels, has been recognized as a milestone in the history of inter-religious dialogue. This book, which has so widely extended the influence of that Seminar, continues to inspire Christians, Buddhists and the followers of other faiths to discover what dialogue truly means. The Dalai Lama's frequent remark that he does not advise people to change their religion (though they are free to do so if they wish) reminds us that conversion is not the purpose of dialogue. If there is one goal of dialogue it could be called friendship. That form of human relationship is universally recognised as a good, or even the highest, achievement of life. Friendship is built on a committed sense of equality, mutual concern and complete honesty. If the religions of the world can be friends the cause of peace moves into a new era.

It was because the Dalai Lama and I sensed this truth a year or two after *The Good Heart* first appeared that we conceived the idea of 'The Way of Peace'. This three-year programme shared between the Dalai Lama and The World Community embodied a remark made in the book: that dialogue consists of more than talking. Pilgrimage, practice and peace-making express the nature of dialogue as well as, and perhaps even more authentically than, speech. In the first phase of The Way of Peace, therefore, a large group of Christian meditators representing the fifty countries of our community joined the Dalai Lama in Bodghaya. Each sunlit morning we sat and meditated with him under the bodhi tree of the Buddha's enlightenment. The following year the Dalai Lama came to an ancient Catholic monastery in Italy where we sat in retreat for several days. The culmination of The Way of Peace took place at the beginning of the millennium at the John Main Seminar 2000 in Belfast. Mary McAleese, the President of Ireland – and, like the Dalai Lama, a patron of the community – and many former presenters of the Seminar, joined us there. The aim was to show that the friendship engendered by dialogue between the faiths could contribute to the healing of humanity's oldest and worst conflicts. As at the original Good Heart Seminar, silence played a crucial part in The Way of Peace.

The continued and indeed expanding life of this book is a lesson in itself. It shows the hopeful hunger for dialogue and deeper spiritual friendship among people of all cultures and faiths. It shows that silence is a forgotten tool of human reconciliation that needs urgently to be reclaimed. It reassures us that one experience of the goodness of the human heart breeds another and that, in the accumulation of these discoveries, we have the strongest ground for confidence about our common future.

Laurence Freeman

The World Community for Christian Meditation

A NOTE TO THE READER

This book explores the Gospels with the Dalai Lama and the participants of the 1994 John Main Seminar. In addition to capturing the proceedings of the Seminar, this book has been augmented with additional contextual material on the Christian and Buddhist traditions to enhance its use as a tool for future interreligious dialogues.

The main body of *The Good Heart* is organized around individual passages from the Gospel upon which the Dalai Lama is commenting. Each chapter begins with His Holiness's reading of and comments on a particular Gospel passage. The Gospel passages used in *The Good Heart* are based on the New English Bible (University of Oxford Press, 1970), which was John Main's preferred version.

Robert Kiely's preface evokes the mood and atmosphere of the Seminar itself. Laurence Freeman's introduction provides an overview of inter-religious dialogue in general, and Christian-Buddhist dialogue in particular.

Occasionally in the body of the text, a narrator's voice briefly appears to set the scene. This is Robert Kiely, highlighting some of the experiences of the Seminar as they occurred. These narrative interludes are set apart in italic type in order to help the reader distinguish them from the actual dialogue. The end of some chapters include the Seminar discussion periods, during which panelists shared insights and queries with the Dalai Lama. In these sections, the speakers are identified.

In the back portion of *The Good Heart*, there is additional information to assist and broaden the understanding of the two spiritual traditions. Father Laurence Freeman has written the section entitled “The Christian Context,” in which he offers a Christian interpretation of the Gospel passages commented upon by the Dalai Lama. He also provides a glossary of Christian terms mentioned in the dialogue.

Geshe Thupten Jinpa, the Dalai Lama’s interpreter, has written the section entitled “The Buddhist Context” in order to provide a general understanding of central Buddhist concepts to readers unfamiliar with Buddhism. Thupten Jinpa also compiled a glossary of Buddhist terms.

Throughout *The Good Heart*, but especially in the back section, both Tibetan and Sanskrit terms from Buddhism are used. For the most part, Sanskrit terms have been rendered in their appropriate scholarly form, with the exception of individuals’ names, which have been written with ease of pronunciation in mind. Tibetan terms have been spelled in phonetics also for ease of pronunciation. Appropriate scholarly spellings of all names and terms can be found in the Buddhist glossary.

For those unfamiliar with the way that Sanskrit words are rendered into English, the chart below offers an easy way to approximate the pronunciation of the Sanskrit terms in this book. For more precise instructions, please see Michael Coulson’s *Teach Yourself Sanskrit* (Kent: Hodder and Stoughton, 1992). In all cases, remember that straightforward explanations for many terms are provided in the glossary.

APPROXIMATE ENGLISH EQUIVALENTS OF SANSKRIT SOUNDS

Sanskrit	*English*	*Sanskrit*	*English*
a	‘b*u*t’	*ā*	‘f*a*ther’
i	‘f*i*t’	*ī*	‘s*ee*’

u	‘wh*o*’	*ū*	‘b*oo*’
ṛ and *ṝ*	‘c*r*ust’	*ḷ* and *ḹ*	‘s*l*ip’
ṃ	‘*m*om’	*ṅ*	‘ri*ng*’
c and *ch*	‘c*h*ain’	*ñ*	‘Bu*ny*an’
ṭ, *ṭh*, *t*, and *th*	‘*t*op’	*ḍ*	‘*d*o’
ṇ	‘*n*o’	*ś* and *ṣ*	‘*sh*e’

And last, we have also included brief biographies of the participants: the Dalai Lama, Father Laurence, Geshe Thupten Jinpa, Robert Kiely, and the individual panelists who participated in this momentous interreligious dialogue.

PREFACE

One of the reassuring things about Tenzin Gyatso, His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, is that, except when he is meditating, he does not seem capable of sitting still. As he spoke before an audience of three hundred and fifty Christians and a sprinkling of Buddhists in the auditorium of Middlesex University, London, in mid-September of 1994, his face and body were a testament to the Buddhist doctrine of perpetual flux. He not only punctuated his remarks with strong-handed gestures, coy smiles, dancing eyebrows, and guffaws, he seemed constantly to be folding or flinging about the loose ends of his maroon habit, seizing the limbs of panelists sitting on stage with him, waving to friends in the audience, and flipping through the program while his translator dispatched a lengthy remark.

The occasion—it would not be an exaggeration to say, the historic occasion—of the Dalai Lama's appearance in London in the autumn of 1994 was the John Main Seminar. This yearly Seminar is sponsored by the World Community for Christian Meditation[1] in memory of John Main, the Irish Benedictine monk who taught meditation in the tradition of John Cassian and the Desert Fathers and founded centers of Christian meditation throughout the world. Each year hundreds of Christian meditators, from virtually every continent and many denominations, gather to hear a series of talks on ethics, spirituality, scripture, interfaith dialogue, and prayer. In the recent past, speakers have included Charles Taylor, a Canadian philosopher; Bede Griffiths, an

English Benedictine author and founder of an ashram in India; and Jean Vanier, the originator of L'Arche, Christian lay communities that are dedicated to living with the disabled.[2]

The invitation to the Dalai Lama to comment for the first time publicly on the Gospels came from Dom Laurence Freeman, OSB, an Oxford graduate in literature and a monk of the Olivetan Benedictine priory in Cockfosters, London. Laurence Freeman has been the most active and influential teacher in the Community since Main's death in 1982.

The Dalai Lama was given in advance eight passages from the Christian Scriptures—including the Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes (Matthew 5), the parable of the mustard seed and the Kingdom of God (Mark 4), the Transfiguration (Luke 9), and the Resurrection (John 20). He was invited to comment on these texts in any way he saw fit. And he was told that his audience was Christian (Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant),[3] mostly English-speaking though from all continents, and that virtually all of them practiced silent meditation daily in their own lives.

Because the Dalai Lama is a head of state as well as a religious leader, many present, while looking forward to his remarks, wondered whether His Holiness would be able to break through the inevitable barriers of press, cameras, and attendants, and truly communicate what was on his mind and in his heart.

The answer came swiftly and with breathtaking ease. Early each morning before breakfast, before anything else on the packed schedule of the conference, he entered the darkened hall with his monks and, with the assembled Christians, he sat perfectly still and meditated for half an hour. In the silence, broken only by a rustle or a cough, anxiety fell away and a bond of trust and openness for what was to come took its place. Then, at last, he bowed his shaved head over the text and, tracing the script with his

finger like a rabbi, read, “How blest are those of a gentle spirit.... How blest are those whose hearts are pure.... How blest are those who have suffered persecution for the cause of right.” And as he read, it was impossible not to be moved, almost stunned, by the power of these familiar words re-cadenced and re-keyed by a Tibetan voice and a Buddhist sensibility.

Conscious of the devastation of the Tibetan culture and people by China and of the Dalai Lama’s own suffering as a refugee and exile, the audience could not help hearing a poignant resonance in the reading. But striking as the political moment was, something else carried the significance of the three-day meeting deeper even than history. There was little doubt in the minds of those present that they had come to hear a spiritual teacher and that what they were experiencing was a profoundly religious event that encompassed history but was not circumscribed by it.

The actual framework of the Seminar was flexible and simple enough to provide an informal atmosphere to the proceedings. It began with meditation, then proceeded to a reading of the Scripture passages in English by His Holiness, commentary, panel discussions, closing chants and prayers, breaks for meals, and back again for meditation and more of the same. But such a description does not really convey an accurate or full sense of the mood or atmosphere at these proceedings. During the readings and commentaries, the Dalai Lama was seated behind a low table, with a person seated on either side of him. On the left sat Laurence Freeman in his Olivetan Benedictine white habit taking notes, nodding agreement, smiling, and looking quizzical—in short, unconsciously acting as a mirror of the audience at large. On the right sat Geshe Thupten Jinpa, the young, slightly built Tibetan Buddhist monk in crimson robes who was acting as interpreter. Serene, collected, focused, and incredibly proficient, he translated His Holiness’s Tibetan

almost simultaneously into fluent English. His own modesty and grace, attentive to the master but never servile, was a constant reminder and example to the audience of near-perfect concentration and selfless dignity.

Because of this arrangement, and perhaps also because of the Dalai Lama's way of being and expressing himself, an apparent monologue was really a dialogue and, more often, a three-way conversation. Neither Dom Laurence nor Jinpa interrupted the discourse, but they were incorporated into it spontaneously as His Holiness excitedly moved in one direction or another, seeking a reaction, correcting a phrase, raising a questioning eyebrow, and releasing tension with a laugh. During the panel discussions, when two members of the audience were invited to sit on the platform and raise questions, the neat format tended to melt down into interconnecting streams of thought, language, accent, age, gender, temperament, and religious persuasion. Yet there was never confusion. The Dalai Lama, as a Buddhist teacher and exile, is at home with change, and he has the ability to calm Western nerves afloat in unfamiliar and shifting currents. Like all great teachers, he also has a talent for seizing and salvaging a good idea that is drifting unobserved beneath the surface.

It has been said that the Dalai Lama is a simple man. Though this may be meant as a compliment, it is difficult to dissociate such a label from a Western tendency to condescend to the religions and cultures of the East, treating them as exotic but philosophically primitive traditions. Insofar as he is earthy, direct, warm, and simpatico, the Dalai Lama may be called "simple"; but in every other sense, he is a subtle, quick, complex, and extraordinarily intelligent and learned man. He brings three qualities to a spiritual discourse—traits so rare in some contemporary Christian circles as to have elicited gasps of relieved gratitude from the audience. These qualities are

gentleness, clarity, and laughter. If there is something Benedictine about him, there is a Franciscan side as well, and a touch of the Jesuit.[4]

From the outset, he gently and quietly reassured his listeners that the last thing he had come to do was “sow seeds of doubt” among Christians about their own faith. Again and again, he counseled people to deepen their understanding and appreciation of their own traditions, pointing out that human sensibilities and cultures are too varied to justify a single “way” to the Truth. He gently, but firmly and repeatedly, resisted suggestions that Buddhism and Christianity are different languages for the same essential beliefs. With regard to ethics and the emphasis on compassion, brotherhood, and forgiveness, he acknowledged similarities. But inasmuch as Buddhism does not recognize a Creator God or a personal Savior, he cautioned against people calling themselves “Buddhist-Christians,” just as one should not try “to put a yak’s head on a sheep’s body.”

In the course of long sessions, reading and commenting on theologically complex texts and responding to challenging questions from panelists, the Dalai Lama never lost his astonishing mental clarity. At one point, he described Mahayana Buddhist meditative practices as disciplines to keep our consciousness alert and focused rather than “scattered” or “sunken” in torpor. One of the forms of respect he paid to his audience was to give it his attention. It is rare for a public figure, even a religious one, not to have “prepackaged” remarks at hand. There are, most likely, occasions when the Dalai Lama is no exception. But it became evident that his moment-by-moment engagement with the Gospels and the people in his presence had a constancy and intensity of mind and heart of which few people are capable. When asked what adherents of different faiths *could* do together without

mixing up yaks and sheep, he recommended scholarship, meditation, and pilgrimages. And then he told of going to Lourdes and finding there such an aura of the sacred that he bowed down and prayed to “all holy beings” for the sustenance of its healing powers. At moments like this, one could hear the audience catch a collective breath, perhaps of pleasure and surprise at an expression of reverence at once so pure and yet so uncompromising of the Buddhist tradition from which it came.

In his reflections on the Transfiguration, he offered a learned discourse on Buddhist views of miracles and supernatural emanations. Without a hint of dogmatism or sentimental piety, he evoked an ancient tradition that has long accommodated a highly rational system of self-discipline and psychology with accounts of experiences beyond the usual limits of reason and nature. He modestly disclaimed having had such experiences himself, but did not see that as a cause to doubt their authenticity. Somehow, listening to him made all the centuries of Christian quarreling over miracles and the possible explanations for them seem foolish.

His reading of the meeting between Mary Magdalene and Jesus in Saint John’s account of the Resurrection brought many to tears. It would be hard to say exactly why. Some said later that it was as if they were hearing the words for the first time, as though their tenderness and mystery and beauty had been taken for granted and were brought to life again, like a gift from an unexpected courier.

When faced with a philosophical or religious paradox or the inexpressible, Westerners tend to grow solemn. Buddhists undoubtedly have a rich array of reactions, and one that enlivened the spirit of the conference was laughter. The Dalai Lama likes to crack jokes about monks, yaks, reincarnation, and visions, but often a gesture, expression, or pause in the flow of discussion—a moment of potential

awkwardness—sets him off into infectious gales of laughter. Toward the end of the Seminar, when nearly everyone was beginning to feel the fatigue of so much concentrated emotion, his superb interpreter, Jinpa, the young monk who had maintained superhuman composure day after day, burst into uncontrollable body-shaking laughter while trying to translate an anecdote told by His Holiness. In answer to the observation that some people say they do not meditate because they are too busy, His Holiness told the story of a monk who keeps promising his pupil that he will take him on a picnic but is always too busy to do so. One day they see a procession carrying a corpse. “Where is he going?” the monk asks his pupil. The punch line, delayed for at least five minutes until the translator, the audience, and the Fourteenth Dalai Lama could control themselves, was, “On a picnic.”

For many Christians, attending ecumenical conferences, like going to church, is “no picnic.” But, of course, feasting and celebration are as much a part of the symbolism and reality of Christianity as they are of all religions. Hearing the Dalai Lama comment on the Gospels was definitely a feast. What impressed and surprised everyone was how much the “outsider” touched them. The exile, the person with no authority over Christians except that which was given by the Spirit, was able to show people of every faith the riches of their own banquet.

Robert Kiely

Cambridge, Massachusetts

INTRODUCTION

In September of 1994, in London, His Holiness the Dalai Lama led the John Main Seminar, an annual international spiritual event held in honor of the Benedictine monk John Main, whom Father Bede Griffiths once called the most important spiritual guide in the church today.

The Dalai Lama and Dom John Main met on only two occasions. The first took place in 1980 at the Catholic cathedral in Montreal, Quebec, where Dom John had been asked to welcome the Dalai Lama as a fellow monk at the opening of a large interfaith evening. During the preparations for the evening, I remember how strongly Father John argued for the inclusion of a substantial period of silent meditation. Religious leaders were present, from archbishops to Native American medicine men, making speeches of goodwill and reciting beautiful prayers. There were choirs, chants, and in the cathedral itself all the visual beauties of Christian art and culture. The organizers were frightened at the suggestion of a twenty-minute period of silence in the middle of such a large and public ceremony. Father John insisted, and Father John got his way.

After the ceremony, the Dalai Lama sought out the Benedictine monk who had welcomed him and remarked how impressed he was with the unusual experience of meditation in a Christian church. Standing beside them, I could sense the affinity between the two men. While they may have been speaking rather superficial words, I felt they were also exploring a deeper, silent level of dialogue. Father

John then invited the Dalai Lama to visit our small, recently started Benedictine community that was dedicated to the practice and teaching of meditation in the Christian tradition. We resided in a small suburban house at that time, and an extended lay community lived in apartments around us. It was a new kind of Christian urban monasticism that derived its life and vision from the rediscovery of meditation in the Christian spiritual tradition.

I remember wondering what the Dalai Lama would make of it, coming as he might with images of medieval European monasteries in his mind. When his hovering secretary intervened, after hearing Father John's invitation, to say that regrettably His Holiness's schedule was too full and there was no free time for him to accept, I was not surprised. But then the Dalai Lama turned to his secretary and said in a tone which lost none of its gentleness but had gained new force, that he *would* accept and they would have to make time. The Dalai Lama insisted, and the Dalai Lama got his way. He and Father John exchanged a look, smiled, and separated.

The following Sunday, a few hours after we had been swept through by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Dalai Lama's cortege of limousines pulled up outside the Benedictine community's house. His Holiness joined us for the midday meditation in our small meditation room and then for lunch with the Community. We ate as usual in silence. After lunch there was conversation, and then Father John and the Dalai Lama withdrew for a private conversation. At the end of the visit we presented him with a copy of the *Rule of Saint Benedict*, and he gave Father John the traditional Tibetan white silk cloth of respect.[5] The Dalai Lama drove away. Father John went back to his work of founding the Christian Meditation Community, and they never met again after that fall afternoon in 1980.

A great deal happened between this meeting and our invitation to His Holiness in 1993 to lead the John Main Seminar. Father John had died in 1982 at the age of fifty-six. The Meditation Community was barely founded at his death, but his teaching on Christian meditation had begun to percolate throughout the Church. It continued to expand in the following years and to nourish the deepening of the spiritual life of many Christians. Twenty-five centers had formed, and over a thousand small weekly meditation groups, which sustained people's individual practice, had spread through more than a hundred countries. The International Center of the World Community for Christian Meditation, which had been founded during the 1991 Seminar in New Harmony, Indiana, led by the Benedictine monk and pioneer in interfaith dialogue, Bede Griffiths, had been opened in London. Previous Seminars had been led by the Sanskrit scholar Isabelle Glover; the philosopher Charles Taylor; the literary critic Robert Kiely; the psychologist and Sister of Saint Joseph, Eileen O'Hea; the scholar John Todd; the founder of L'Arche, Jean Vanier; and the Jesuit scholar and theologian William Johnston.[6]

To my surprise and delight I received a quick personal response from the Dalai Lama. He remembered his meeting with John Main thirteen years before, was pleased by the growth of his community worldwide, and would be happy and honored to lead the latest Seminar. The brief meeting of the two monks long before had brought us to a wonderful opportunity. The question was, how were we going to grasp it?

We had invited His Holiness to lead the Seminar, the first non-Christian to do so, for a number of reasons. His meeting with Dom John Main, although brief, had been highly significant. It had illuminated the importance of developing the necessary dialogue between the two religions at the deeper level that is made possible and widely accessible

through meditation. Something is touched in sharing deep silence together that words can point to but never quite express. His Holiness, as an individual, has also become one of the most loved and accessible spiritual teachers in the world today. Tibet's agony, which he carries constantly with him, has elevated him to a global spiritual role in which the universal religious values of peace, justice, tolerance, and nonviolence find a joyful and yet profoundly serious embodiment. This was evident the moment His Holiness read aloud the Beatitudes at the first session of the Seminar. Everyone felt they were more than words in his case; they were insights he had personally experienced.

In searching for a way to grasp this opportunity, the answer seemed clear: by letting it go. It seemed to me that this was an unprecedented opportunity. A Seminar in which the Dalai Lama would spend three days with a group of spiritually committed Christian meditators and their equally committed non-Christian friends was too unique to use as just another interfaith discussion group. I had already informed His Holiness that our Seminars included times of meditation as well as times of vocal dialogue. We would have three periods of meditation together each day, and these periods would not be squeezed in; they would be central to the whole event. Naturally, he had no problem with that. The problem now was not that we would be silent, but determining a topic of discussion.

We considered the usual kind of philosophical and religious themes for such a Buddhist-Christian event and felt they did not do justice to the uniqueness of the opportunity. Then we decided to really let it go. We would make a gift to His Holiness of that which is most precious, holy, and profound for us as Christians: we would ask him to comment on the Christian Gospels. He accepted without hesitation, remarking only that, of course, he knew little about the

Gospels. His comment struck me as a most impressive sign of his self-confidence, and of his humility.

Two or three years earlier he had stunned his audiences in London by his learned and scholarly presentations of Buddhist philosophy. Any academic would have been proud of this achievement. Now he was willing to come before a Christian audience, albeit a sympathetic and contemplative one, and talk about what, *he* said smilingly, he knew very little about. Once he had accepted this idea, the Seminar became an event of great anticipation. It was a gamble, a risk of faith on both sides. We had no doubt that the time of meditation and presence together would be worthwhile in its own right. Anyone who has spent any time with the Dalai Lama knows that his presence bestows peace, depth, and joy. But, even with the Dalai Lama, there was no guarantee that the Seminar would succeed as a dialogue.

Instead, the 1994 John Main Seminar, The Good Heart, succeeded in a way no one could have anticipated. And I would like to reflect now on the success of this historic event. The Dalai Lama's commentary on the Christian Gospels constitutes the heart of this book, and the implication of these words reach far forward into the continuing dialogue in the coming millennium between the religious traditions of the human family. This book suggests the importance of this dialogue for the future of the world and offers a much-needed strategy to meet the challenge of creating world peace and universal cooperation in the decades ahead: it offers a *model of dialogue*.

Presence

In a way, the John Main Seminar originated many years before in the special way that the Dalai Lama and Dom John Main were present to each other during their meetings. The Dalai Lama has also spoken about this factor of presence in

the description of his meetings with Thomas Merton.[7] It was this same chemistry of presence that ensured the meaningful dialogue at the 1994 John Main Seminar. (Afterward, the Dalai Lama remarked that he had learned more about Christianity during the Seminar than at any other time since his conversations with Merton thirty years before.)

Presence is one of the most important lessons *The Good Heart* has to teach us—Buddhists, Christians, and the followers of all faiths—if we are to learn a better way to respond to the contemporary challenge to dialogue. As this presence in dialogue is nonverbal and nonconceptual, it might sound vague or platitudinous; but it is nonetheless a hard fact. It is difficult to describe, but it is the first thing we experience in dialogue. *How* are we perceived by each other? The success of the verbal dialogue depends upon and builds directly upon this foundation of mutual presence. Words cannot achieve a successful dialogue if presence is not there. And without this insight, words can go wildly wrong.

In his opening remarks, the Dalai Lama spoke about the importance of all the different forms of dialogue being practiced today between religions. He affirmed the importance of scholarly dialogue. But he also said that he felt the most important and—to use a characteristic term for a Buddhist—the most effective dialogue was not intellectual exchange, but a conversation between sincere practitioners from the position of their own faiths, a conversation that arises from a sharing of their respective practices.

This idea is common to Christian and Buddhist thinkers. In the early Christian monastic tradition, the Fathers spoke warmly about the importance of *praktike*, the knowledge born from experience rather than conceptual knowledge. Cardinal Newman[8] spoke of the danger of living your faith simply from a position of “notional assent,” lacking

experiential, personal verification. John Main's insistence that it was necessary for Christians to recover the contemplative dimension of their faith was based on the assertion that we must "verify the truths of our faith in our own experience." What is new about this idea in the context of *The Good Heart* is that the concept is applied to dialogue between different faiths, and not just to the deepening of the discovery of one's own traditional religious beliefs.

This is very challenging and, to many sincere practitioners, also disturbing. It suggests that there exists a universal, underlying level of common truth that can be accessed through different faiths. When people of different faiths are in experiential dialogue with one another, the truth can be experienced through their willing suspension of exclusivity toward one another. If this is true, then does it follow that each particular faith is no more (no less?) than a particular door into the great audience chamber of Truth? As we will see shortly, the Dalai Lama addresses this challenge very subtly and directly.

It is important here simply to note the relevance of presence for this kind of new and indeed pioneering dialogue. This presence is human, ordinary, affectionate, friendly, and trusting. All four hundred people felt this the instant His Holiness walked into the hall at the opening of the Seminar. This quality of presence should not be underestimated when we think about modern interreligious and intercultural dialogue. It should certainly not be dismissed as an emotional element subordinate to the realm of pure ideas. If, as the Dalai Lama believes, the proof and authentication of all religion is the realization of a good heart, a human being's innate qualities of compassion and tolerance, the same standard can be applied to dialogue, which has today become an important work and activity of all religions.

In the past, religious action could be viewed more narrowly in terms of the celebration or exploration of one's own beliefs or rituals. Today an additional element has entered human religious activity, as we enter with empathy and reverence into the beliefs and rituals of other faiths without adopting them as our own. The fruit and authentication of this new activity, largely unknown to earlier generations of humanity or even regarded by them as disloyal and blasphemous, is the same as that of all religions: compassion and tolerance. Dialogue should make us not only feel better about others but also make us more conscious of ourselves and more true to our own essential goodness. Dialogue makes us better people.

We cannot achieve this in the abstract. Dialogue demands not just clarity of ideas and a certain degree of knowledge about one's position and the position of other people; it demands a personal involvement. The objectivity, detachment, and intellectual organization needed for dialogue are not ends in themselves—any more than efficiency or the profit motive should be ends in themselves for any business or social group. The intellectual discipline required for dialogue allows the natural tendency toward egotism to be filtered or contained. This releases the individuals involved in dialogue to find the deeper levels of their own consciousness where dialogue opens onto a common window of truth through an experience altogether beyond the conceptualizing mind.

Friendship

The Dalai Lama's openness to presence was crucial for the success of the Seminar. His self-confidence and ease, despite the risk he was taking, set others at their ease and gave us all confidence that we had nothing to lose except our fears. It became, too, the basis of a friendship that was also the bedrock of fruitful dialogue. Dialogue will certainly