

Buddhist Monks Lead Marches for Human Rights and Freedom in Burma



The world continues to watch a nonviolent confrontation unfold in Burma (renamed Myanmar by its current repressive government). Thousands have joined Buddhist monks who are protesting the violations of human rights, state-sanctioned violence, and the disregard for democratic citizen involvement that have marked the current regime in this South East Asian country. In the spirit of solidarity, people of faith are watching the news, praying that the demonstrators are heard and not met with violence, and are voicing their support to the U.S. Administration and the United Nations, who are taking action to help transform the unjust system of the current state and to stop human rights violations.

Pope John Paul II on International Human Rights:

I would like to emphasize that no human right is safe if we fail to commit ourselves to safeguarding all of them. When the violation of any fundamental human right is accepted without reaction, all other rights are placed at risk. It is therefore essential that there should be a global approach to the subject of human rights and a serious commitment to defend them.

Only when a culture of human rights which respects different traditions becomes an integral part of humanity's moral patrimony shall we be able to look to the future with serene confidence.

In effect, how could there be war if every human right were respected? Complete observance of human rights is the surest road to establishing solid relations between States. The culture of human rights cannot fail to be a culture of peace.

The promotion of a culture of human rights which engages consciences requires all sectors of society to work together.

- Pope John Paul II

-World Message of Peace, 1999

Prayer For the Burmese People

We see them walking, walking.
Sorrow in one hand, hope in the other.
May we walk with them in spirit,
May we also be a visible hint
of God's promises,
So each step we take together
Moves us all closer
to the Incarnated Body,
The Kingdom of God that we create
For all members of the human family,
Walking, walking, walking
On the journey to justice.



On Engaged Buddhism:

“When faced with immense suffering, Buddhists must take action and engage their society, confronting those responsible for profound suffering. Buddhism puts priority on human persons and not simply on human progress. . . Engaged Buddhists believe that inner transformation and social action are intergral parts of the

same spiritual path. In a world where more and more people are defined by the quantity of their possessions and material riches, Buddhism, in contrast, prizes being over having, people over profit, and interconnectedness over individualism.”

From: *Globalization, Spirituality and Justice*
by Daniel G. Groody, 2007 Orbis Press

2006 Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue Annual Letter to the Buddhist Community

Dear Buddhist Friends,

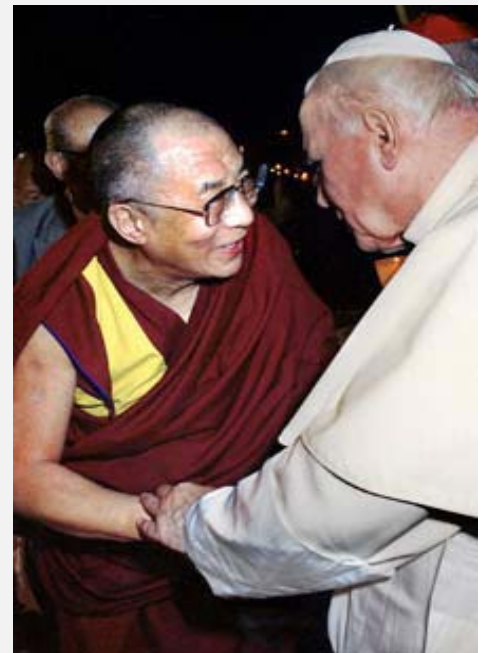
On behalf of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue I offer to you and to all Buddhist communities around the world my very best wishes for Vesakh [major Buddhist holiday]. I hope that you may have a joyful feast.

As is now customary, I would like to take this occasion to share with you some thoughts which may help to strengthen the relations between our two communities. This year these reflections are based on Pope Benedict XVI's first letter to Catholics throughout the world. This letter, *God is Love*, or according to its Latin title *Deus caritas est* (DCE), examines the nature of love. His Holiness the Pope is convinced that this word, so frequently used and yet so often misunderstood, needs to have its true meaning [God's loving agape] restored in order to become a beacon of light for everyday life. . .

Through our dialogue we have come to appreciate the importance that you Buddhists give to love for one's fellow human beings which is expressed in the concept of *metta*, a love without any desire to possess but only to help others. It is understood as a love which is willing to sacrifice self-interest for the benefit of humanity. So *metta*, according to Buddhist teaching, is not confined to benevolent thought, but extends to the performance of charitable deeds, to the service of one and all. It is indeed a universal benevolence. Nor should one forget that other virtue, *karuna*, through which is shown loving compassion for all living beings.

In this world where the word love is so often used and misused would it not be useful for Buddhists and Christians to rediscover its original meaning according to their respective traditions and to share their understanding with one another? This would be an encouragement for the followers of both traditions to work together to build up relations based on love and truth, to promote mutual respect, to foster dialogue and to further collaboration in the service of those who are in need.

Archbishop Michael L. Fitzgerald,
President, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, 2006



Pope John Paul II greets the Dalai Lama in 2000

Who are these Buddhist Monks?

It is estimated that approximately 80-90% of Burma's population is Buddhist. While some monks stay for their entire lives, almost all young men enter the monastery for a short time as part of their spiritual development. Monks as the spiritual leaders of the community are esteemed and respected by the society. Meditation, detachment, and mindfulness are key disciplines of the monks.

There are two main schools of Buddhism: the Theravada and the Mahayana. The monks in Burma are Theravada Buddhist Monks; Theravada meaning "Doctrine of the Elders". They trace their teachings back to the earliest written sources from Buddha in the 5th century BCE. Their meditation and practice focus on individual freedom from craving and suffering. The Mahayana monks differ from the Theravada monks in that they emphasize *helping others* achieve their freedom.

In Burma there are approximately 400,000-500,000 Monks. Burmese Monks have a spiritual role to play in the society, helping others gain personal freedom, but they have also been known for their political activism. They have often been the leaders of protests against oppressive regimes.



Source of map: www.pbs.org

Learn More about Burma

The following web sites are useful resources to learn more about the status of the conflict and its origins:

Monks Rising: The Basics on Burma

An excellent resource from the Christian Science Monitor to understand the events leading up to the protest and what led the monks to this action. This site includes video footage to explain what's happening.

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0927/p04s01-briefing.html>

News & Background on Burma from BBC News

This site features an extensive country profile of Burma and includes maps and statistics of interest. It provides very clear background information, multimedia links and a timeline placing this current conflict in context.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/country_profiles/1300003.stm

Is it Burma or Myanmar?

Explore the tension between the names used to refer to this country and find out 'what's in a name.' http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/7013943.stm

Buddhism in Focus

To learn more about Buddhism in general and the various schools of Buddhism as well as news related to this situation refer to the Buddha Net.

<http://www.buddhanet.net/>