

June 2010:

The Dalai Lama on Religion

Recently Leonardo Boff, the Latin American Christian theologian, met the Dalai Lama and had an interview with him. The brevity of the interview does not take away from its extraordinary depth and wisdom. Nobody who is seriously concerned with inter-religious dialogue can afford to ignore the Dalai Lama's words. Meeting Rivers is pleased to reproduce this amazing interview. Here is the interview as reported by Boff himself:

In a round table discussion about religion and freedom in which Dalai Lama and myself were participating, at recess I maliciously, and also with interest, asked him: "Your holiness, what is the best religion?"

(which surprised me because I knew of the malice contained in my question.)

He answered: "The best religion is the one that gets you closest to God. It is the one that makes you a better person."

I thought he would say: "The Tibetan Buddhism" or "The oriental religions, much older than Christianity".

Dalai Lama paused, smiled and looked me in the eyes

To get out of my embarrassment with such a wise answer, I asked: "What is it that makes me better?"

He responded: "Whatever makes you more compassionate, more sensible, more detached, more loving, more humanitarian, more responsible, more ethical."

"The religion that will do that for you is the best religion"

I was silent for a moment, marvelling and even today thinking of his wise and irrefutable response: "I am not interested, my friend, about your religion or if you are religious or not. What really is important to me is your behaviour in front of your peers, family, work, community, and in front of the world. Remember, the universe is the echo of our actions and our thoughts."

"The law of action and reaction is not exclusively for physics. It is also for human relations. If I act with goodness, I will receive goodness. If I act with evil, I will get evil."

"What our grandparents told us is the pure truth. You will always have what you desire for others. Being happy is not a matter of destiny. It is a matter of options."

Finally he said: "Take care of your Thoughts because they become Words. Take care of your Words because they will become Actions. Take care of your Actions because they will become Habits. Take care of your Habits because they will form your Character. Take care of your Character because it will form your Destiny, and your Destiny will be your Life ...

and ... " There is no religion higher than the Truth."

Leonardo Boff was born in Brazil in 1938. He currently serves as Professor Emeritus of Ethics, Philosophy of Religion and Ecology at the Rio de Janeiro State University.

Boff was one of the founders of liberation theology. In 1992, receiving a silencing order from the Vatican, he left the Franciscan order of which he was a member stating that "the future of humanity and planet earth" are more important than the future of the institutionalised church. He has been honoured with various awards, within Brazil and the rest of the world, for his struggles on behalf of human rights for the weak, oppressed and marginalized.