



You Christians know too much about God

Recently I read a statement about Christianity that provoked much reflection in me. It was the statement of a Taoist philosopher. When asked by a Sister from Hong Kong what he thought of Christianity, he replied, "You Christians know too much about God." The statement surprised me.

From further discussions the Sister came to think that while he respected Christians he believed that we are doctrine rich but contemplation poor. We know so much there is hardly anything left to discover or to wonder about. The Taoist philosopher feared "that so much knowledge will lessen the desire to stand before the mystery and diminish the joy of tending constantly towards the ineffable."

Chinese philosophers are famous for their thought-provoking, enigmatic statements. We Christians do have a lot of doctrines. There is nothing wrong with that except when they rob us of the sense of wonder and openness to mystery.

We are a verbal culture. We concentrate on pedagogy rather than mystery and mysticism. We tend to undermine our liturgies and symbols by explaining them. We preach and teach thinking if only people understood then they would be converted. Yet we know inside it is the person of Jesus who fascinates and not doctrines about him. Christ is caught not taught. God is, as Rudolph Otto described, a 'mysterium tremendens,' a mystery that is both fascinating and awesome. It is the power of this mystery which gives life, which touches our heart and soul.

There tends to be too much rationality, information and talk in the modern Western world. Even in our prayers we talk too much trying to impress God, trying to grasp him when what he requires is that we be silent and let him grasp us. Sometimes when we preach and teach, our words both hide the mystery from us and alienate our listeners who would be better served by being helped to encounter the mystery in their lives, a mystery that is nourishing and hope giving, fascinating and awesome.

Personally I am not good at this but I do believe that there is some truth in the Taoist philosopher's challenge and also in Fr Karl Rahner's claim that if there are Christians in the future they will almost certainly have to be mystics.

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