

## ***As Christians, how should we view other faiths and our own spiritual mission?***

Learning about the faith of another has the capacity to strengthen our own. The questions we are asked by non-Christians about what we believe and why we believe it compel us to examine those beliefs, and articulate them. Moreover, as we hear about the beliefs of others, we discover points of convergence and divergence, helping affirm our own convictions while coming to respect those of others. In short, in learning about the faith of others, we learn more about the Christian faith.

Some argue that multifaith dialogue is incompatible with the conviction that Jesus is “*the way, and the truth, and the life,*” and that “*no one comes to the Father except through me*” (Jn 14:6). Moreover, some will claim that we have an injunction by our Lord to “*make disciples of all nations*” (Mt 28:19), and that any dialogue should be aimed toward this goal. However one wishes to interpret these passages and evaluate the truth claims of other religions, the fact is that other faiths *do* exist. We have two choices in relation to other faiths – conflict or dialogue.

In 2001, Francis, Cardinal Arinze, then President of the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, spoke at Westminster Abbey, near Mission before an ecumenical gathering. He talked about the elusiveness of certainty, given the sinful nature of human beings, and about the grace of God working in the lives of many people through the ages and around the world. As the child of followers of a Nigerian tribal religion, he knows well that the kingdom of Christ can manifest itself in unexpected ways, among those who have never even heard the name of Jesus. Arinze emphasized that Christians must cherish what is true, honourable, good and noble in the faith traditions of others; for in cherishing such things, we are cherishing that which is of God. The grace of God, he concluded, is shed on people and in places in ways we cannot even imagine.

If we believe that Jesus Christ is indeed the mediator of salvation *and* Creation, and that he died for the sins of the whole world, then that must mean something to us when we consider what his reign looks like. It means that his kingdom cannot be about hatred or exclusion; that it cannot be about partiality or judgment. Our king, enthroned on his cross, remembers the faithful of the world who suffer for their faith, whichever faith they profess. He remembers the creatures of the Earth destroyed as a result of greed and exploitation. He remembers refugees fleeing bombs, victims of hatred beaten and killed, those who are addicted to drugs or alcohol, those who live with disease, depression, loneliness and despair. All the suffering of the Earth causes our Lord to weep, for all of this occurs in his kingdom. But our Lord enthroned in glory at the right hand of the Father also remembers the joy and the hope and the creativity in his creation. The web spun by a spider, the drawing made by a child, the love between friends, the prayers offered in church, mosque, and temple, all, as the Cardinal said, true, honourable, good, and noble.

The boundaries of the kingdom of God are broad, and its inhabitants diverse. The One who reigns over that kingdom is Love – love more deep and complex and multifaceted than we can ever imagine. It is enough to humble us all, whenever we dare think a word which would limit those boundaries, exclude some inhabitants, and so deny the One who is Love itself.

We, as Anglicans can become an example of what reconciling and incarnational faith can achieve. As our region becomes increasingly diverse, as we look to the 2010 Olympics and the building of the Inter-Spiritual Centre, we can seize the initiative to transform hearts, transform lives, and transform our world.

*- Prepared by the Ecumenical and Multifaith Unit, Diocese of New Westminster*