

Yoga, Tai Chi, Reiki

Bishop Peter Elliott warns of the dangers behind all 3 fads as he reviews Br Max Sculley's searching critique.

At times some Catholics seem to be tempted to adopt an unusual kind of triumphalism.

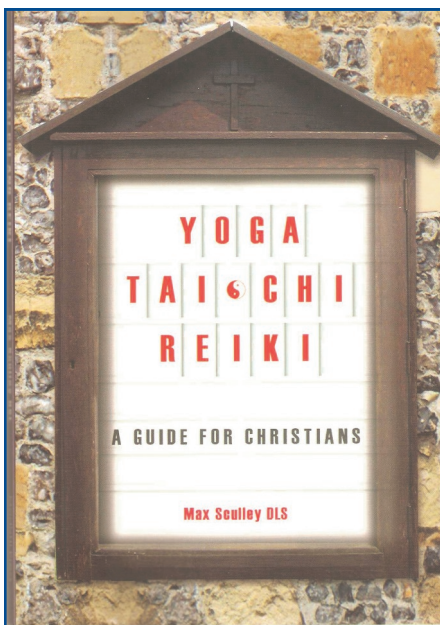
They believe that the Church can happily absorb and “baptize” almost anything in other religions.

We have seen this trend developing over recent decades with Catholics embracing various form of Eastern mysticism, meditation or healing. In our schools, parishes and religious congregations, these practices come and go. The Enneagram is a case in point. Halls and other facilities are rented out to meditation circles or martial arts groups. Even children are introduced to what seem to be only peaceful methods of meditation. In a society where the New Age movement flourishes, where everything is tolerated in the gaudy supermarket of “spirituality”, few dare to question whether Christians should be involved in practices that seem directed towards human flourishing and well-being.

In his ground breaking book, *Yoga, Tai Chi, Reiki, A Guide for All Christians*

Br Max Sculley examines three of these practices, two well-known and widespread, the other less known but more problematic. Br Max tackles issues of faith and

well-being that are arising as Christians take up Yoga meditation, Tai-



[YTCR] \$25.00, *Yoga, Tai Chi, Reiki: A Guide For Christians*. Br Max Sculley, DLS. Modotti Press, 180 pp, pb.

Chi exercises and the therapy known as Reiki Healing. His book has a strong ecumenical emphasis. It is written for all Christians and has a useful biblical basis.



Br. Max goes beyond theories, philosophies and methods and asks the

pastoral question. If these practices are meant to help us spiritually and physically, what is going on when disillusioned people report negative experiences, such as fear, confusion and deep suffering?

Yoga has been around for many years in its various forms, as exercise and relaxation or as therapy after illness or trauma. Br Max goes to the heart of the Yoga technique by first asking whether a Christian should meditate by absolutely clearing his or her mind and entering an “altered state of consciousness”. It we erase our intellect and will, to what influences do we open doors?

Now some people will reply that the great Catholic mystics did this. But that is not true, obviously so if you read their writings. This claim also reflects a misunderstanding of grace and human nature. We are not meant to use techniques that appear to be short cuts to mysticism or, worse still, that give an instant mystical experience. The demand for instant experience is a problem, not unrelated to the drug sub-culture.

From a Christian point of view, resorting to techniques reflects the error that human effort is what counts, not *the free gift of God's grace*. In the case of a Christian mystic, contemplation may be prepared for by years of a *moral* life, which

needs to be emphasised, and *spiritual self-discipline*, but contemplation itself always remains an infused gift of God. It is not our own achievement, not derived from the manipulation or surrender of human consciousness. Grace is what matters, and whenever we pray or meditate we should ask for grace. But that does not mean assuming a total passivity, a spiritual heresy known and condemned three centuries ago as Quietism.

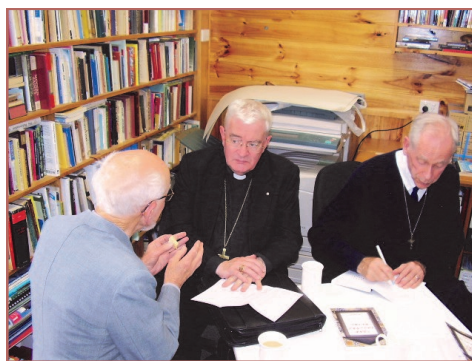
This reliance on grace is in sharp contrast with non-Christian spiritualities that rely on some human technique, method or effort, which in turn leads to an altered state of consciousness or strange impressions and vivid psychic experiences. Are these from God or are they mental illusions, or are they something worse? Anyone reading this book is led to consider such questions, and that is why it has been commended by Bishop Julian Porteous with a useful Foreword.

The bishop indicates two Vatican documents that open up questions regarding techniques derived from Eastern religions: *Some Aspects of Christian Meditation*, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1989, and a reflection on the New Age, *Jesus Christ, the Bearer of the Water of Life*, Pontifical Council for Culture and the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, 2002. These guides are not as widely known as they should be, so I hope that we will receive further guidance from Rome in the future because the problem of false spirituality shows no sign of going away. That is evident in the nonsensical “eco-spirituality” that has penetrated several congregations of religious in this country.

Br Max argues that the psychic powers which allegedly stem from

Yoga are condemned in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2116. This rests on a scriptural basis. There is also the issue in Yoga of invoking false gods, which of course is idolatry, a violation of the First Commandment.

In a brief chapter, that may assist those who have innocently taken up Yoga, Br Max indicates that it can be adapted in a Christian way. Yoga can be shorn of its non-Christian spirituality, the invocation of false gods and any arrogant psychic goals by being modified, reduced to exercises combined with Christian prayer of praise.



Bishop Peter Elliot talks with Br Christian Moe (left) while author Br Max Sculley (right) signs books at the launch of Yoga, Tai Chi, Reiki.

When he turns to **Tai-Chi**, Br Max describes a soft kind of martial art that has become fashionable because many people find that it is peaceful and relaxing. We are all familiar with scenes from China, when groups of elderly people gather early in the morning in parks or on squares to go through the elegant gestures of Tai Chi. It all looks gentle and harmless until Br Max asks the pertinent question, but what is “Chi”? Is this the Taoist divine energy within the cosmos, the “source”, as the art itself claims, or is Chi an illusion? More seriously, is Chi “of God” or does it rise from the demonic realm?

Now some supporters of these Eastern practices will say that all this is only symbolic, that terms such as “Chi” are just words we can use for natural phenomena we do not fully understand. I do not think that solves anything. It is also rather offensive to people in the Hindu or Buddhist tradition to demythologise what they take seriously.

The third part of this informative book covers the practice known as **Reiki healing**. Br Sculley calmly and clearly shows that Reiki exhibits the worst features of entanglement with the Occult, that it is an attractive way of entering the realm of the demonic or diabolical, ultimately bringing not healing but fear and suffering.

Reiki is not a harmless practice, nor can this therapy be purified of dangerous elements as may be possible with Yoga. Nor can it be dismissed as “symbolic” or psychological. It stems from a Japanese Buddhist who claimed that a “medicine king god” gave him powers in a vision, and from that man its practitioners emerged along strangely similar lines to the apostolic succession of bishops. Masters of Reiki lay their hands on initiates who then become adepts at this healing art, and in turn the new masters lay hands on other successors. That spirits are invoked and involved is no secret. But what spirits? Let us not imagine that the Holy Spirit is at work here or that God’s holy angels are involved. There is nothing Christian about Reiki.

I recently heard of Reiki being used by a woman who assists pastorally in a Catholic hospital, located in another State. The practitioner is a sincere person who imagines she is helping people with her healing hands and psychic energies. But I was advised that an elderly lady (the

subject of Reiki gestures) and her startled daughter both sensed that “something” was wrong. This is an example of how the Holy Spirit dwelling within us through Baptism and Confirmation activates a “sense of faith”, an instinct that protects and guides us. The Spirit himself comes to our aid to help us discern what is “of God” and what is not “of God”. *Discernment of spirits*, terms used by Saint Ignatius, is a key theme running through this book, and we need it in our Church today.

Br Max Sculley has not said the last word on these issues nor would he want to make such a claim. Not eve-

ryone will agree with everything he presents. But calmly and forcibly he seeks to open up a conversation that has been largely suppressed. A polite silence needs to be broken. That false peace has been brought about, not only by the naïve triumphalism I have already indicated, but by imagining that we tolerate other religions by welcoming into our community Eastern meditation, martial arts or mystical therapy.

Irenicism, a peace-at-any price approach to inter-Faith dialogue was never envisaged by the Second Vatican Council. The practices described and analysed in this book

are derived from *some* dimensions of Hinduism and Buddhism that cannot be reconciled with Christianity. We need to identify these areas in charity and honesty, but above all when they mislead sincere people and bring fear and suffering to those who are drawn into Eastern techniques.

I know that this book will be contested. However, to those who criticize Br Max and his work I would only say, if you can disprove his claims then come forward and show us alternative arguments. □