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Opinions

Buddhist monk's prayer holds wisdom for all

Editorial

Jackie Carpenter

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At a recent Harrison County Council meeting, the Rev. Thich Hang Dat of Corydon, a Buddhist monk, was invited to pray before the start of the meeting. He graciously accepted.

Under the leadership of council chair Gary Davis, and at the time, vice chair Carl Duley, some years ago the council opted to have prayer before each meeting begins. That in itself would be enough to incur the wrath of some people, such as an atheist, who would argue that they should not be forced to listen to someone pray to a God in whom they do not believe. But that has not been a problem. Usually prayers are non-sectarian in nature so a Presbyterian, for instance, in the audience would not be offended by the prayers of a Buddhist.

In fact, a woman who formerly attended quite a few meetings of county officials said when the policy was adopted, that it shouldn't be a problem as long as the prayers were ecumenical. So far, no one has openly complained, even though some prayers have been far from general in nature.

In such a small community, where everyone knows just about everyone else, no one is likely to make such complaints for fear of being criticized themselves.

But there have been a few calls recently from Christians to this newspaper's anonymous opinion column, the Live Wire. The problem has not been one of prayer allowed in a government meeting, but rather complaints about the religious sect allowed to offer prayer.

Those callers probably were not at the meeting, but saw the monk's picture in this newspaper under "Life in Harrison County."

We'll get into what the monk actually had to say in a moment, but first let's discuss the doctrine of freedom of religion on which this nation was founded.

For an explanation, we'll turn to our current President, George W. Bush.

The President said, at a national dinner in September 2005 celebrating Jewish life in America:

"Religious freedom is a foundation of fundamental human and civil

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rights. And when the United States promotes religious freedom, it is promoting the spread of democracy. And when we promote the spread of democracy, we are promoting the cause of peace."

He added, "Religious freedom is more than the freedom to practice one's faith. It is also the obligation to respect the faith of others ..."

We need only turn to the warring factions in the Middle East to understand what happens when hatred or disdain takes the place of respect.

The Buddhist monk's prayer, which he read in halting English, was offered as an expression of thought about what it means for a person to have integrity. Frankly, we could all learn from this discourse, whether Protestant, Catholic, Jewish or Buddhist.

The Rev. Thich Hang Dat:

"A person of integrity is endowed with conviction, conscience and concern; he is learned, with persistence, mindfulness and good judgment.

"A person of integrity has friends who are endowed with conviction, conscience, concern, who are learned, with persistence, mindfulness and good judgment.

"A person of integrity gives advice neither for his own affliction, nor for the affliction of others, nor for the affliction of both.

"A person of integrity is one who refrains from lies, divisive tale bearing, harsh speech and idle chatter.

"A person of integrity is one who refrains from taking life, stealing and illicit sex.

"A person of integrity gives a gift attentively, with his own hand, respectfully, not as if throwing it away.

"A person of integrity is one who recognizes: There are fruits and results of good and bad actions. There is this world and the next world. There is mother and father. There are spontaneously reborn beings."

How could anyone be angered at those thoughts? Certainly not the God to whom most of us pray.



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