

DISCUSSION PAPER

on

M. W. Padmasiri de Silva's

THE DISTANCE BETWEEN THE LABORATORY AND MONASTERY

by

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RESPONSE

Committee IV

Padmasiri de Silva, "The Distance Between the Laboratory and Monastery."

It is a personal pleasure to respond to Dr. de Silva's essay. I have benefitted on previous occasions from his books and other writings, and that has continued here.

I agree with his concern for communication between the two categories of science and religion. I'm appreciative of what he sees as an overlap in communication, especially at the mystical and theoretical level. I agree that in the past, there has been a lack of communication at the level of values and emotions, and behavior, i.e., ethics. However, I think there has been some shift in recent years.

In addition to significant scientific study of religion, there has been a growing awareness of the role of, or the underlying presence of, values in scientific research. The nineteenth century search for pure objectivity does not exist. As Howard Slatte put it, there are no immaculate perspectives. It does not follow from that, of course, that one has no further need of objectivity and one is free to lie and steal and perpetuate fraud in science or religion either one. Both categories of thought and activity have been inundated with immorality over the years. Some claim that fraud in science is very minimal and soon ferretted out as others try to replicate discoveries and claims. Others suggest the fraud is but the tip of the iceberg and that in fact, relatively little replication goes on. Grants and awards are not based on replication efforts but new discoveries, breakthroughs, headlines.

Thus values, ethics, moral standards, simple honesty and truthfulness

have had some increased attention in recent years. Where once it was taken for granted that science was the search for truth, people now know this is no longer true. Grantsmanship and public acclaim have carried increasing weight in the laboratory, and perhaps in the monastery as well.

On the scientific side, there has been some moderation of the absoluteness of the scientific method. In part, this has come from the mystic seekers among the scientists. In part it has come from an increasing awareness of the values cited above. In part, it comes from a growing humility on the part of scientists who now realize that they do not have all the answers. Science has provided nuclear power but that has been made into bombs that can destroy the world. Scientists have provided new methods of maintaining life but realize they do not have the answer as to when life should be maintained. As more and more of them end up as corpses on the end of tubes and wires that keep the body pumping, those who are left are getting somewhat leary of the Frankensteins they have produced. Numbers of scientists have entered the struggle for humane health care, world peace, and the cause of human decency.

On the religious side, there has also been some moderation of an earlier arrogance. While some continue to claim their way [in some cases "my" way] is the only way, others have reached out in tolerance and love and care. While there are still "creationists" around fighting the theory of evolution, others realize it is only a theory and science as a whole has contributed an enormous amount of good to the world. To put it another way, religionists have become more objective while scientists have become more subjective.

I think the East has made a major contribution in this regard. This has been partly by holding to the wholeness of life in contrast to Western

specialization and splintering. De Silva himself is a living, dynamic representative of this as a Buddhist who heads a philosophy and psychology department in a major university. The wholeness of the East here finds its home in a modern university. The West in turn can contribute its specialization to the East for out of that specialization has come advances in health care, nutrition, transportation, communication, etc. Perhaps we should add the psychology and philosophy to which de Silva himself has contributed as a Buddhist who has been trained in both the East and the West.

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