

Practicing Mindfulness is Distinctive in Christian Higher Education

Dr. Maria Lai-Ling Lam

IAPCHE international conference

May 30-June 3, 2016

Objectives

1. To investigate the relationships between the practices of mindfulness and Christian devotional experience.
2. To inspire Christian educators to know how to incorporate the practices of mindfulness in the Christian tradition.

Research Questions

- 1. What is mindfulness?
- 2. Why does mindfulness become mainstream in the U.S. culture?
- 3. What is Christ-centered mindfulness?
- 4. How will the Christ-centered mindfulness be practiced in our Christian high education?

On-going Research

- Maria Lam (2016). “Empathetic Leadership as an Alternative Paradigm for Responsible Supply Chain Management”
- ----- (2012). “An educator as a contemplative practitioner in business education.”
- ----- (2007). “Inspiration of St. John of the Cross to Business Professional.”
- -----(2015). “Peace and Marketing education.”
- Eshelman, Lam, Cook (2012). “Three contributing factors to effective utilization of technology in management education and practice: Personhood, Mindfulness, and Meditation.”

Mindfulness

Internet Results: **3,920,000**

Hon Kubat-zinn's definition of Mindfulness:

*“Mindfulness is moment to
moment
awareness”*

Mindfulness movement

- 1979, Jon Kaba-Zinn, MBSR (mindfulness-based stress reduction)
- 2015, >1000 certified MBSR instructors and MBSR programs in more than 30 countries.
- McMIndfulness
- Mindfulness.Inc.
- Corporate Mindfulness Google way
- Organizations' practices
- Positive effect of mindfulness on attention, cognition, emotion, behavior, and physiology.

What are the needs of human beings behind the mindfulness movement?

- 1. Seek meaning for human existence;
- 2. Need stability, control, and efficiency in our attention;
- 3. Want to improve our cognitive capacity, cognitive flexibility, emotional well-being, self-regulated behavior, stress management, aging , and neuroplasticity.
- 3. Have broad sets of capacities;
- 4. Demonstrate part of our parasitic practices in the individualistic and consumer-oriented culture.

Critique on Mindfulness

- Ron Purser and David Loy (2013).
- “Uncoupling mindfulness from its ethical and religious Buddhist context is understandable as an expedient move to make such training a viable product on the open market.”

Critique

Thomas Merton (1971:164)

Contemplation in a World of Action (New York: Doubleday, 1971)

“What is the relation of this(meditation) to action? Simply this: He who attempts to act and do things for others or for the world without deepening his own self-understanding, freedom, integrity and capacity to love, will not have anything to give others. He will communicate to them nothing but the contagion of his own obsessions, his aggressiveness, his ego-centered ambitions, his delusions about ends and means, his doctrinaire prejudices and ideas. There is nothing more tragic in the modern world than the misuse of power and action to which men are driven by their own Faustian misunderstandings and misapprehensions. We have more power at our disposal today than we have ever had, and yet we are more alienated and estranged from the inner ground of meaning and of love than we have ever been. The result of this is evident. We are living through the greatest crises in the history of man; and this crisis is centered precisely in the country that has made a fetish out of action and has lost (or perhaps never had) the sense of contemplation. Far from being irrelevant, prayer, meditation and contemplation are of the utmost importance in American today.”

Christ-centered Mindfulness

- Must be in the context of Jesus Christ's life, death and resurrection.

Augustine, "Thou has made us for thyself, O Lord, and heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee."

Herb Prince, " 'Who we are' cannot be lost in the enthusiasm for 'what we want to attain' or on 'who want to be.' "

Christ-centered mindfulness in Christian Tradition

- “The unique Christian emphasis in mindfulness is related to centering prayer’s emphasis on surrender to God’s active, healing activity in the life of the believer.”
(Keating, 2014)
- Contemplative prayers
- Classical Christian Devotions

Thomas Merton “Seeds of Contemplation”

- (p.23) “The secret of my identity is hidden in the love and mercy of God....Therefore there is only one problem on which all my existence, my peace and happiness depend: to discover myself in discovering God. If I find Him, I will find myself and if I find my true self I will find Him. But although it looks simple, it is in reality immensely difficult. In fact if I am left to myself it will be utterly impossible.”

Thomas Merton, “Seeds of Contemplation.”

- Contemplative Prayer is a deep and simplified spiritual activity in which the mind and will rest in a unified and simple concentration upon God, turned to Him and intent upon Him and absorbed in His own light, with a simple gaze which is perfect adoration because it silently tells God that we have left everything else and desire even to leave our own selves for His sake, and that He alone is important to us, He alone is our desire and our life, and nothing else can give us any joy. (153)

Thomas Kelly “A Testament of Devotion”

Mystical exaltations are not essential to religious dedication...<nor is> religion only for a small group, who have certain vivid but transient inner experience...The crux of religious living lies in the *will*, not in transient and variable states. Utter dedication of the will is open to *all*... Where the will to will God's will is present, there is a child of God.

The Rules of Benedict. “Stability, Obedience, Humility.”

- *true humility is simply a measure of the self that is taken without exaggerated approval or exaggerated guilt. Humility is the ability to know ourselves as God knows us and to know that it is the little we are that is precisely our claim on God. Humility is, then, the foundation for our relationship with God, our connectedness to others, our acceptance of ourselves, our way of using the goods of the earth and even our way of walking through the world, without arrogance, without domination, without scorn, without put-downs, without disdain, without self-centeredness. The more we know ourselves, the gentler we will be with others.*

Contemplative pedagogy is the cultivation of inner awareness through first-person investigations and knows our human existence in the context of life, death, and resurrection.

Classroom Practices

Have a short period of meditation;

Feel being presence;

Experience inner wholeness

Adopt process view & multiple perspectives

Questions

- 1. How do you naturally and gracefully lead students to practice Christ-centered mindfulness in an academic setting?
- 2. How do you choose the mindfulness practices that involve whole selves and are embedded in the Christian tradition?