

Cluster Forum

Zen Buddhist On A Baptist Campus

Dr. Eligio S. Gallegos, associate professor of psychology, has been on the Mercer faculty for three years. Originally from New Mexico, he received

discipline which leads an individual to an understanding of his entire process of living.

CLUSTER: Are you a practicing Buddhist?

DR. GALLEGOS: Well, I don't think that I am a Buddhist as such. Zen Buddhism is a discipline oriented toward an individual understanding of himself. There are a lot of things about Buddhism in general that Zen Buddhist don't adhere to. Zen Buddhism is not a "thing"; that is, it is not something that is well defined. It is a thought process.

CLUSTER: Then, are you saying that Zen Buddhism is very different from the type of Buddhism practiced in India?

DR. GALLEGOS: Yes. They describe it in this way. They say that Buddhism is an individual coming to a point of understanding of who he really is, and this point is at the peak of a mountain with a long slope which he must travel. It will take a long time for him to walk up the slope, and if death reaches him first, he may never reach the peak of the mountain at all. On the other hand, Zen Buddhism is a steep approach of the peak. It takes a tremendous effort, but one can reach the top of the mountain in a few jumps.



his Ph.D. from Florida State University. After much thought and an "intense emotional experience", he became a practicing Zen Buddhist.

CLUSTER: Is Zen Buddhism a religion?

DR. GALLEGOS: I don't think it is a religion because there are no gods. Buddha himself was a man. It is a dis-

Dr. Walter Moore
Will Speak in Chapel
Friday, February 13.

CLUSTER: How did you become interested in Zen Buddhism?

DR. GALLEGOS: Actually, it was an intense emotional experience that kind of turned my life upside down. I happened to read at that time a series of essays by a gentleman named Krishna Murti, and these were the most profound writings that I had ever read. He seemed to understand the true meaning of life. As I read this, I became interested in how he had reached this insight. It was through the practice of Zen Buddhism.

CLUSTER: In this mental discipline are there practices such as yoga or meditation?



DR. GALLEGOS: Yes, there is a great deal of meditation and of course it is a thing that you do with your entire body, this meditation. What you have to do eventually is come to understand your feelings and thoughts, your way of thinking, your way of seeing things, and so on.

CLUSTER: Most modern religions seem to have a moral discipline based on a code of

good and evil. Does Zen Buddhism have such a code?

DR. GALLEGOS: Good and evil is a qualitative judgment about a situation and it depends upon judgment from a certain standpoint. Zen Buddhism puts you right there without this framework, and you can see things for what they are and see them in their reality rather than from a personal judgment. I think this was one of Jesus' notions. You shouldn't judge people or anything else. If you do, you impose on reality something of your own background.

CLUSTER: Does Zen Buddhism try to give meaning to life and death?

DR. GALLEGOS: In Zen Buddhism life doesn't have to be explained. It's just there. It's part of being what you are. On the other hand, when death comes you accept that, too. It's just part of living. I think many religions have been developed out of a fear of death. It seems we fear death because it means we will lose the concept of what we think we are. We think we are the object of thought, but we are actually the process of thinking itself. I think people are afraid to give up what Freud would call the ego.

CLUSTER: In a Baptist or Christian oriented atmosphere such as Mercer supposedly has, how do people, especially the students, react to your beliefs?

DR. GALLEGOS: I find them extremely receptive. In fact, many of the students seem to be searching for something that will lead them to understand themselves. I think modern religions don't do this at all. Modern religions pose

for them a kind of formula that if they accept, things will go well, and there will be few future changes. Zen Buddhism re-orientates them to within themselves, and this is where they have to work out their understanding, not at some external level.



Photo by Joe Cook

CLUSTER: Do you find younger people more receptive to Zen?

DR. GALLEGOS: Yes, they are still seeking while the old-

er generation have more or less discovered something that gives them some kind of contentment in life. Zen Buddhism doesn't require that you search for continuous contentment or try to hang on to a contentment. It revolves around the notion that contentment, desire, or anger are feelings that are momentary. They don't persist. It is the trying to hang on to them that makes an individual rigid. It makes him unable to view something new for the first time and view it for what it is worth rather than for what his system tells him it is worth.

CLUSTER: If a person was interested in becoming a Zen Buddhist, how would he begin?

DR. GALLEGOS: He should probably read a book written by Phillip Kapleau. He is the only American Zen Master, and he has written a very readable book called THE THREE PILLARS OF ZEN.

CLUSTER: Thank you, Dr. Gallegos, for your time. I'm sure that you have answered many questions which interest the reader of the CLUSTER.

Thompson, Suit Speak Republican Workshop

Six Mercerians recently attended an all-day Young Republican educational workshop held at the Sheraton Motor Inn in Macon.

Speakers at the meeting included Mayor Ronnie Thompson, Hal Suit of WSB-TV fame and of more recent date a candidate for Governor. Senator Frank Miller of DeKalb County who is running for the office of Lt. Governor, and Senator Billy Adams of Bibb County. Panels held included finances, socials, and communications. The Communications panel was moderated by Wright Davis of the Walter F. George School of Law and in-

cluded Rocky Wade of the Liberal Arts School.

The panel discussion covered the spectrum from newsletters to phone committees to local campus newspapers. Later, they were confronted with many questions; several aimed directly at the situation on the Mercer campus itself.

After the seminar, fifteen Mercerians attended a "Swing into '70" party honoring Senator Oliver Bateman, an "unannounced" candidate for the office of Governor.

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