

Don't tell me

Religion is best served unheard, in blissful inner silence. Unless you have a stomach strong enough not to believe everything you hear or read. Or, a heart humbly wise enough to respect others.

One of the most terrifying experiences we can have, as sane people, is to hear a glassy-eyed evangelist tell us how true his God is, and why we should listen and follow him. When we try to have a simple dialogue, we find that we are talking with an absent wall of pre-recorded gibberish.

The best response when approached by an evangelist is never to engage him. This is just what he wants. He probably senses that our pride is our weakness, and he is going to use it. Once we reply him in any way, his fangs are sunk into us. The more we speak, the more the blood of sanity and humanity is sucked out from us.

Never be tempted by the notion that we have the wisdom to convince him. It is not that we lack the wisdom, but it is giving what is sacred to the dogs. If, by any chance, we speak a truth clearly, he would only change tack, and turn to another topic, leaving us at a loss (again).

Silence is the best defence to those who have no ears to really hear us. It is best for us to make an immediate return to humanity and those that we love.

Most zealous evangelists I have known are those who were darkly moved by an adolescent impulse to prove themselves by our "converting" to their way of thinking. But as they mellowed over the years, and they always did, many of them became more realistic and friendly. They even recanted their past domineering ways.

Religious truth and salvation are not won through persuasion or debate. We each need to taste their sweetness or bitterness for ourselves. Whether or not there is some divine will, we must move with our own hearts, rightly or wrongly. We all have the capacity to learn and to change. And we must be willing to learn and change.

The most liberating realizations are not heard in the din of religious preaching and selling, but in the heart's stillness, a true clarity that is capable of revealing everything to us, if we really care to look long enough.

The truest faith is that which teaches us to calm our hearts and pride. If we are truly silent and still enough, then we can but see what eyes see not, nor ears hear. It is a blissful peace that embraces all. Yet, all this makes no sense, unless we have been truly silent ourselves. (The point is that we need to stop sensing for a moment, and just feel.)

Sweet flowers, ancient trees, gurgling streams and mountain mist may not speak to us in our language, but it is so easy to feel their peace without any cost. Even memories of these flowers, trees, streams and mountain mist evoke peace within us.

Don't Tell Me by Piya Tan

One of the most vital freedoms we must preserve for ourselves is the freedom of not knowing, especially when this not-knowing makes us more peaceful, happier, kinder and more creative people.

If all this sounds somewhat abstract, perhaps, this thoughtful little prose poem by **Annie Dillard** (b 1945), US Pulitzer Prize writer, best known for her narrative non-fiction, makes very good sense:

Somewhere, and I can't find where,
I read about an Eskimo hunter who asked the local missionary priest,
"If I didn't know about God and sin, would I go to hell?"
"No," said the priest, "not if you did not know."
"Then why," asked the Eskimo earnestly, "did you tell me?"
Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (1974:123)

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