



The Martial Arts and the Christian Soul

Women of Grace Staff

Karate and the martial arts are said to be good for everything from self defense to teaching discipline to children; but what about the soul?

Much like other fitness regimes that have roots in oriental mysticism, the amount of spiritual content incorporated into a martial arts class is almost always left up to the instructor – which should come as little comfort to the discerning Christian.

However, not all of the martial arts are equal as far as spiritual content. In an article he wrote about the different forms of the martial arts, B. J. Oropeza, a professor at the C. P. Haggard School of Theology at Azusa Pacific University, names Aikido, Ninjitsu, and Tai Chi as the most incompatible with Christianity.

Aikido means “the way to union with the universal force”, with this force being known as “chi.” Christians do not believe in, nor does science support, the concept of a “universal force” so a practitioner of Aikido is ultimately striving for union with a false god.

Ninjitsu is another form that is not compatible with Christianity. As Prof. Oropeza describes: “The Ninja tries to assimilate himself with nature in order to be more

stealthy, and has a pantheistic worldview which believes all is God. The Christian believes that God is not the universe, but the Creator of the universe (Gen. 1:1-2)”

Tai Chi is off-limits because it involves the practice of Taoism. “In order to achieve physical well being, the Tai Chi student must be attuned to the universe by concentrating below the navel section of the body — which is said to be the body’s psychic center,” Prof. Oropeza writes. “Tai Chi





cannot be reconciled with Christianity.”

There are many other forms, such as Judo and Jujitsu, and Tae Kwon Do (Korean karate) that have a low spiritual emphasis.

Karate, on the other hand, requires meditation, which usually involves emptying the mind of distractions. “It is at this point that Karate becomes spiritually dangerous,” Prof. Oropeza writes, but adds that since karate is primarily a physical martial art, the meditation aspect can be divorced from it.

Herein lies the “rub” when it comes to fitness regimes that have eastern roots. The spiritual aspects *can* be divorced from the practice, but *are* they? Is it enough that the non-Christian element may – or may not be – left out? Is it wise to leave so much up to the whim of an instructor?

Brother Ignatius Mary, OLSM, Catholic apologist and catechist, says no. “The problem with martial arts is that its origins are in oriental cosmology and philosophy that is inconsistent with Christianity. If you can find an instructor who teaches the marital art as exercise and self-defense **WITHOUT** references and involvement in orientalisms, then you should be okay.

“Finding such an instructor will be difficult, however. And, just because an instructor is Catholic does not guarantee anything unfortunately. Many Catholic instructors shamefully incorporate the orientalisms into their training.”

In other words, we’re on our own when it comes to discernment in these classes. Are we up to the task? Are we well-armed and well-practiced in our faith?

Considering that we live in an age of poor Catechesis, it’s safe to assume that the average Catholic who attends a karate/martial arts class probably can’t name the three theological virtues let alone distinguish between an eastern and a Christian meditation technique.

Karate and the martial arts may be the “trendy” way to teach ourselves discipline and self-confidence, but Christianity does the same thing, only without the violence and risk to the soul.

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