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Yahoo, Yoga, and Yours Truly

Thursday, October 7, 2010

Well, you never know what a day holds. This morning, Yahoo put the Associated Press story about my article on yoga on its front page. The rest, as they say, is history. My mail servers are exhausted. Messages have been coming in at a rate of about a hundred an hour. The first lesson — count the cost when you talk about yoga. These people get bent out of shape fast.



Today, Dylan Lovan of the Associated Press titled his story, “[Southern Baptist Leader on Yoga: Not Christianity](#).” Well here is the appropriate next headline: “Christian Concerns About Yoga: Not News.” You would think that Christians had never asked the question before. To Lovan’s credit, he framed his story on the controversy that followed my original article, published back on September 20, “[The Subtle Body — Should Christians Practice Yoga?](#).”

Lovan documents the controversy and quotes me as saying: “I’m really surprised by the depth of the commitment to yoga found on the part of many who identify as Christians.” Well, double or triple that now.

Here are the lessons I have learned thus far from the controversy:

1. I have received hundreds of emails and comments against my article from those identifying as Christians. Not one—not a single one—has addressed the theological and biblical issues. There is not even a single protest communication offering a theological argument.
2. Evidently, the statistics reported by the yoga community are right. This is a female dominated field of activity. More than 90 percent of the protest communications come from women.
3. Sadly, almost every protest email makes my point better than I ever could myself. I have heard endless claims that there is no incompatibility between yoga and Christianity because it makes people feel better, it helps spirituality, it is a better way to know God, etc. There is no embarrassment on the part of these hundreds of email writers that they are replacing biblical Christianity with a religion of their own invention.
4. The kind of thinking represented by this avalanche of emails is perfectly illustrated by the comments of Stephanie Dillon, a local yoga instructor here in Louisville who attends the best-known church in our area:

Stephanie Dillon, who has injected Christian themes into her studio in Louisville, said yoga brought her closer to her Christian faith, which had faded after college and service in the Army.

“What I found is that it opened my spirit, it renewed my spirituality,” Dillon said. “That happened first and then I went back to church.” Dillon attends Southeast Christian Church in Louisville and says many evangelical Christians from the church attend her yoga classes.

She said she prayed on the question of whether to mix yoga and Christianity before opening her studio, PM Yoga, where she discusses her relationship with Jesus during classes.

“My objection (to Mohler’s view) personally is that I feel that yoga enhances a person’s spirituality,” Dillon said. “I don’t like to look at religion from a law standpoint but a relationship standpoint, a relationship with Jesus Christ specifically.”

Now, in fairness to Ms. Dillon, she might have said or have meant to say more than is reported here, but taking her comments at face value, we see Exhibit A of the problem. She comments that yoga “renewed my spirituality,” with no reference to anything remotely Christian and Gospel-centered about this renewal. She insists that yoga “enhances a person’s spirituality” without any recognition that this is not what biblical Christianity is all about. But, she prayed before deciding “to mix yoga and Christianity,” so everything must be just fine.

5. I have heard from a myriad of Christians who insist that their practice of yoga involves absolutely no meditation, no spiritual direction, no inward concentration, and no thought element. Well, if so, you are simply not practicing yoga. You may be twisting yourselves into pretzels or grasshoppers, but if there is no meditation or direction of consciousness, you are not practicing yoga, you are simply performing a physical exercise. Don’t call it yoga.

6. We are in worse shape than we thought. I have heard from a myriad of souls who have called me insane, incompetent, stupid, vile, fundamentalist, and perverted. Some others are best left unreported. These souls claim to be Christian, but offer no biblical argument nor do they even acknowledge the basic fact that yoga, as a spiritual practice, runs directly counter to the spiritual counsel of the Bible. Instead, I have been treated to arguments like these. From a “devoted Southern Baptist church member who resents your ignorance”: *I get much more out of yoga and meditation than I ever get out of a sermon in church.* From “a Christian who goes to church every service”: *My favorite image I use in yoga is that of Jesus assuming a perfect yoga position in the garden of Gethsemane as he prays.* And, to cap it all off: *How do we know that the apostles and early Christian guys did not use yoga to commune with Jesus after he left?*

My email box is filling back up as we speak. This is going to be a very long day.

Dylan Lovan, “[Southern Baptist Leader on Yoga: Not Christianity](#),” the Associated Press, as published on the front page of Yahoo.com, Thursday, October 7, 2010.

R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “[The Subtle Body — Should Christians Practice Yoga?](#),” Published September 20, 2010 at AlbertMohler.com.

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