

What about Yoga?

<https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/the-trouble-with-yoga> (excerpt)

Many Catholics have been asking if they can use yoga, and they have been given a wide spectrum of answers by clergy and lay Catholic leaders. What exactly is yoga? Are there legitimate concerns about its use by Christians? Have Catholic leaders been fair and accurate in their analysis of the strengths and dangers of yoga?

What is yoga? Classical yoga is a holistic (i.e., “whole body”) discipline originating in Hinduism that seeks enlightenment through a series of exercises that unite the body, mind, and spirit. Enlightenment is the end, and union (*yoga*, “yoke”) is the means.

The body postures of yoga are in themselves neutral. Moving the body into a certain position does not necessarily engage the person in any particular spiritual activity.

Problems with yoga: The use of yoga as a spiritual path is highly problematic. There are three major areas in which the spiritual practice of yoga is not in line with Catholic spirituality.

Monism: Monism is a philosophy that holds that all that exists is one. Rather than the communion that exists between God and his creation that Christians hold to be true, the monist believes that any distinction between God and the universe is illusory and that the enlightened person will become “one” with the divine, without any distinctions between persons. . . . As one example of what to watch for, be wary of the mantras commonly used in yoga practice. An example is the mantra “*So’ham*” (pronounced *so-hum*). This mantra “means ‘*I am He, that is, ‘I am the universal Self,*’” which they recommend you repeat in time to your breathing—soon the inhale, *ham* on the exhale (p. 317). So keep in mind that if you’re asked to intone anything in a language you don’t

know, it may be expressing a concept that runs contrary to your beliefs.

Gnosticism: It may seem strange to say that a spiritual path that incorporates physical postures and techniques into its practice is anti-material. But yoga as a spiritual path stresses the necessity of detachment from the material world, to the extent of affirming that the material world is illusory and that all that matters is the spiritual.

Although yoga did not spring up within the Christian tradition, this view of the material as the “enemy” of the spiritual resembles the Christian heresy of Gnosticism, wherein salvation (for the yoga practitioner “enlightenment”) is sought by freedom from the material.



While Christianity stresses the importance of detachment from all that separates the believer from union with God (cf. CCC 2556), the purpose of detachment is relational. It brings us into communion with the Triune God and with the saints in glory. The union is forged by love, which gives and receives—not drowned into an impersonal divine but freely shared between the Persons of God and the persons of his saints. “I want to see God’ expresses the true desire of man. Thirst for God is quenched by the water of eternal life” (CCC 2557).