

## Chapter 7: Notes & References

It now seems possible that the visit by Father Ippolito Desideri to Tibet in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and his extensive studies of Buddhist teachings while there had a significant effect on European thinking, contributing to the Enlightenment, despite the Vatican prohibiting the publishing of his account at the time. For a fascinating explanation see Alison Gopnik, *Could David Hume have known about Buddhism*, Hume Studies, Vol 35, 5-28, 2009 and:

<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/10/how-david-hume-helped-me-solve-my-midlife-crisis/403195/>

The *pattern* for the saint's day on McDara's island, the one sailing boats still dip their sails for, occurs on July 16<sup>th</sup> each year. Local boats take anyone arriving at the small quay (at Ard West on the Carna peninsular in south Connemara) across to the island for a Mass led by the local clergy. Caher Island's *pattern* is on 15<sup>th</sup> August and it is the islanders of the adjacent Inishturk who will take you over for free in their boats, but you have to pay for the morning ferry from Roonagh to Inishturk. However, following recent visits from Irish health and safety officials the *patterns* only occur if the sea is calm and the boats at Ard West now only take non-locals who have brought their own lifejacket. In unsuitable weather the Mass occurs instead in Inishturk's small church and in the new lifeboat shed on Ard West pier, which I suspect is way oversized so it can also do this job.

More information on Connemara's monastic islands can be found in *A Guide to Connemaras's Early Christian Sites*. Anthony Previte, Oldchester Press, Oughterard, Co. Galway.

At the end of the trip to Morocco with Ajahn Amaro and Stephen, as we were driving back to Marrakesh and the airport, Ajahn Amaro told us that Ajahn Chah encouraged them to question everything, and that there was no orthodoxy other than the rules for living in the community. Today Ajahn Chah is usually placed within a clear line of teachers as a disciple of the famous meditation master Ajahn Mun, but actually Ajahn Chah only ever spent four days staying at Ajahn Mun's monastery.

Reading about his life, to me, it seems that Ajahn Chah worked most if it out for himself, typical of the forest tradition then: a monk simply rejected the life of the village monastery and took to wandering, practising on his own or with a small group of others. After many years of this, Ajahn Chah settled in a small patch of forest with some disciples and there he became the teacher who is known today. Perhaps this self-realised aspect is why his teaching is so clear and why it is often compared to Zen Buddhism, which like the Thai forest tradition was also originally a movement rejecting a life of study and devotion to return to a simple life of meditation.

Today that simple practice in Thailand's forest has solidified into a tradition with its own orthodoxy. Having renounced study it is now producing innumerable books, and while once it was supported just by poor rural villagers, now it is the Thai middle class who drive to the monasteries to lavish the monks with too much support. They can now live in great comfort if they choose.

The way the Forest Tradition in Thailand has changed as it became an institution seems to be typical for religious movements. When Ajahn Sumedho first came to England the life in the first monastery, Chithurst, had to be austere, as there was little support. So if you were there, lay or monastic, you were only there for practice – it was not for a pleasant life or any sense of status. That too is now changing. The same will probably happen to the 'Secular Buddhist' tradition that Stephen sees himself as part of. I can imagine a Buddhist version of the Baptists or Quakers, conscientiously trying to be free of past orthodoxy, terribly well meaning, and politically correct, but also an institution. Religious movements always seem to ossify and slowly lose their heart and it appears to be related to how they steadily become more comfortable. The difference is that in our age change happens so much faster.

Refs:

*Mission To Tibet: The Extraordinary Eighteenth Century Account of Father Ippolito Desideri, S.J.*

Translated by Michael J. Sweet, Wisdom Publications, Boston, US, 2010.

*The Sacred Mountain.* John Snelling, East West Publications, London, 1983.

*Journey to Lhasa and Central Tibet,* Sarat Chandra Das, John Murray, England, 1902.