



## STATEMENT DM065

### Should a Christian Practice the Martial Arts?

A controversial issue within Christianity today is whether a Christian can practice the martial arts. There are three primary views. To gain perspective on this issue, let us briefly consider each one.

First, some say that because of its unchristian origin (Eastern mysticism), no martial art form should be practiced by Christians. However, an unchristian origin *in itself* may be insufficient grounds for rejecting the martial arts since this view commits what is known as the “genetic fallacy.” This error assumes that since the *origin* of a belief or practice was wrong, despite its development, it is *still* wrong today.

Yet, if we were consistent in applying this kind of logic, we should also abandon astronomy because its roots are in the practice of astrology. As a policy we believe that, instead of committing the genetic fallacy, it is better to try to ascertain how much of an influence foundational beliefs may have had on the object of discussion before prematurely discarding it.

The second view argues that as long as the Christian divorces the religious aspects (Eastern mysticism) from the martial arts, he or she may practice them. To evaluate this view, we must briefly examine some of the major branches of the martial arts.

**Aikido.** Aikido means “the way to union with the universal force.” This *impersonal* force is known as “chi.” The goal of Aikido is to control both self and environment. Ironically, this martial art is the most compatible with Christianity in regard to its nonviolent nature, but — on the other hand — it is unalterably steeped in Eastern mysticism.

**Judo and Jujitsu.** Judo involves many grabbing and throwing techniques. Jujitsu concentrates on the human joint locks and concerns itself with striking and maneuvering procedures. Both of these forms have a very low spiritual emphasis.

**Karate.** Karate involves meditation, which usually includes the emptying of one’s mind from all outer distractions. It is at this point that Karate becomes spiritually dangerous. Nevertheless, since Karate is primarily a *physical* martial art, the meditation aspect *can* be divorced from it.

**Kung Fu.** Kung Fu is very diverse. There are different styles of Kung Fu. The more traditional forms stick close to their Buddhist philosophical roots, while the less traditional forms concentrate more on the physical aspects. Generally, Kung Fu is more mystical than Karate.

**Ninjitsu.** Ninjitsu is not generally compatible with Christianity. The Ninjas try to assimilate themselves with nature in order to be more stealthy. The worldview behind Ninjitsu is pantheism (all is God), which contradicts the Christian view that God is *not* the universe but is the *Creator* of the universe (Gen. 1:1-2).

**Tae Kwon Do.** Tae Kwon Do is a physical, sport-oriented form of the martial arts. It is one of the most compatible forms of Eastern self-defense with Christianity.

**Tai Chi.** Tai Chi 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. Tai Chi cannot be reconciled with Christianity.

In view of the above, it is clear that certain martial arts cannot be divorced from their Eastern worldview while others can. Aikido, Ninjitsu, and Tai Chi are the most incompatible with Christianity.

Ultimately, whether a Christian should participate in one of those martial arts that *can* be reconciled with Christianity depends primarily upon the instructor. If the instructor promotes Eastern mysticism, the Christian should avoid that school. If the instructor divorces the *practice* of the martial art from the *philosophy* behind it, then the Christian may, in good conscience, participate.

A third view is that the martial arts are not compatible with Christianity because of their violent nature. This is a legitimate position, for many Scripture passages do speak out against violence (e.g., Matt. 26:52). However, other Christians point out that when Jesus spoke with soldiers, He did not say combating was morally wrong (Matt. 8:5-13). Moreover, Jesus instructed the disciples to take a defensive sword with them as the time of His arrest by the authorities approached (Luke 22:36). The apostle Paul indicated that there was a legitimate use of force by the government in punishing wrongdoers (Rom. 13:1-5).

The above verses have led many Christians to conclude that the Bible does not condemn self-defense and that the use of force is sometimes justified. While we would support this conclusion, we recognize that the issue of self-defense is one that must be determined by each individual believer's conscience.

We recommend that the Christian keep the following factors in mind if he or she decides to practice a martial art: First, the Christian must realize that because this is a controversial area, he or she must be careful not to cause a weaker Christian to stumble by practicing a martial art (Rom. 14). Second (primarily for youths), the Christian must guard against the temptation of starting fights. Third, the Christian should not allow a martial art to overshadow or detract from his Christian commitments (Heb. 10:25). Finally, the Christian should pray, and examine his or her conscience and motives. These steps will insure that one's involvement in a martial art will be based not on unworthy motives but on reflective thought. —*BJ. Oropeza*