

Daily Meditation 10/18/2021

What Is Deep Ecumenism? Why Now?

Good morning.

We're meditating together on deep ecumenism. And I'd like to tell you a few stories that I've encountered over the years.

The story of a young man from mainland China who joined our program at Holy Names College several years ago. And he had never been a Christian; he'd never opened the Bible in his life. But his grandmother hid him in the basement during the cultural revolution in China and taught him the ancient ways of qigong and tai chi meditation. In fact he was so adept at those practices that I actually hired him, even though he was a student in our master's program, to teach a course on tai chi and on qigong.

And what was so interesting was that he did papers for me comparing Meister Eckhart to Lao Tzu, and Hildegard of Bingen to Confucius that was good as any papers I'd received over the years, or since, from Christian students.

So that raised the whole question: How can this fellow, who doesn't know the Bible, tap into the messages of Hildegard and of Eckhart, who are very grounded, of course, in the western scriptures. Because at the level of mysticism, and spiritual practice, too, there is one underground river, and he did tap into that.

I remember him doing a sweat lodge with us, and afterwards he told me that in China this tradition is present also. That they used to do sweat lodges in China in the old days as well.

Another story I tell is that when I was lecturing once at a Mennonite seminary in the Midwest, a woman in an Indian sari came up to me afterward and said, "You're the first Christian theologian I've ever met who spoke Hindi." And I said, "Wow, I was trying to speak English." "Oh no," she said. "I mean that you were speaking a language that I understood from my Indian roots, from my heart."

And, again, of course I've written my Meister Eckhart book, my most recent Meister Eckhart book is on Kumar Swami and the Hindu influences that he felt very deeply in reading Meister Eckhart. In fact, he says, "Reading Eckhart is like reading the Upanishads." That's an incredible compliment coming from a Hindu, for sure. But my point is: he said, "There are sentences in Eckhart that feel like they were translated from the Sanskrit. That's how close to Hinduism he is."

And, of course, I demonstrate in that book that he's also close to Sufism, to Judaism, to Carl Jung, and to Buddhism--for sure, Thich Nhat Hanh.

But my point is that when we start relating at the level of deep ecumenism, that is, of spirituality, this is where so much of our common treasures come forward. And that's why deep ecumenism is so important today.

And one more story. I was lecturing in Santa Fe years ago, and I was showing Hildegard of Bingen slides. And, of course, I pointed out some of her paintings that, in fact, are paintings of the Hopi Corn Mother, and so forth. But afterwards, a very old Native American man came up to me. He was toothless, and he hugged me, and he said, "While you were talking, my ancestors came and sat on my shoulder and said, "Listen to this man. He is one of us." And then he said that the slides I showed of Hildegard, he said, "Well, she is one of us, also." (After seeing her slides and hearing the explanation of it.)

So, my point that I'm making is that when we operate out of the level of spirituality, not just systematic theology, or what Sunday School taught us, or religion at a sociological level...when we go deeper into that spiritual dimension, we are already becoming one with one another. This one underground river of wisdom bubbles up, and we do find ourselves speaking common language.

That is deep ecumenism.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.