

Daily Meditation 10/21/2021

Thich Nhat Hanh's Advice for Christianity

Good morning.

In this morning's daily meditation, Thich Nhat Hanh tells us that Christianity will recover its most viable jewels when it recovers the insight of inner being, non-duality, and the Apophatic Divinity.

In my book on Meister Eckhart, *Mystic Warrior For Our Times*, my chapter on Eckhart meeting Thich Nhat Hanh is called "The Apophatic Divinity: Meister Eckhart Meets Buddhism Via Thich Nhat Hanh."

And Meister Eckhart had such a rich rich development of the Apophatic Divinity and of course "apophatic" means "without light"

-- the darkness -- so Eckhart says:

"God is superessential darkness that has no name and will never be given a name.

"God is without name, and is a denial of all names, and has never been given a name. This is why the prophet says 'You are truly a hidden God who dwells in the ground of the soul, where the ground of God and the ground of the soul are one ground.'

And Eckhart goes goes on and on, insisting how we pay attention to this via negativa, this apophatic dimension to God. He says:

"God is unfathomable and so has no name, for all the names the soul gifts to God are derived from her own understanding. The deficiency lies in language--" the deficiencies lies in language...

"--all creatures cannot fully express God. They are not receptive to what God really is."

So there's paradox involved here, because on the one hand the Cataphatic Divinity, the God of Light, celebrates the light in all things. And there is light in all things; I'm looking right now at the sunny sky, with sunny clouds, and there's beauty in that, there's the Divine in that.

But there is also this dimension of what is missing in our language: the Divinity is beyond all words and language. Eckhart says:

"Whatever one says that God is, God is not. That is what one does not say of God, rather than what one says. God dwells in the light which is inaccessible."

And so whenever we talk about God, he says, we have to stammer... we have to stammer.

So this introduces a great deal of humility into the theological project, into religion: that we deceive ourselves if we go around stamping "In God we trust, In God we trust, In God we trust" on our coins and dollars and MX missiles and the rest, because we really don't know who God is.

Thomas Aquinas, who preceded Eckhart, said that: "We don't know who God is; we know who God is not, and God is not like us, although we are called to be like God."

And I think this humility of allowing Divinity to be something greater than our words, and our language, and our projects, and our projections... I think this humility is so needed today. And not only in religion and by believers, but outside the sphere of religion, if you will.

Science too is now beginning to wrestle with the mysteries of nature: that we don't have all the answers about the most important or basic questions -- about what matter is, the relationship of matter and light, or matter and spirit for that matter.

And so Eckhart says, "The most beautiful thing a person can say about God consists in that person's being silent from the wisdom of an inner wealth. So be silent, and do not flap your gums about God. For to the extent that you flap your gums about God, you are lying, you commit sin. If you want to be without sin and perfect, do not flap your gums about God."

And so again, this is to introduce a sense of transcendence, the sense of greatness, the sense of awe that is bigger than words.

Yes, we respond to awe with silence. We go "hmm," and eventually we may respond to awe with creativity, with dance or music or poetry, because these are other other ways to utter our experiences, our deepest experience.

So these are a few of Meister Eckhart's reflections on the whole chapter, as I say, on his understanding of the Apophatic Divinity. But I end the chapter with the quote from today's Daily Meditation from Thich Nhat Hanh:

"If we can bring into Christianity the insight of non-duality, we will radically transform the way people look—†on the Christian tradition, and the valuable jewels in the Christian tradition will be rediscovered."

He's suggesting, of course, that they've been lost. We have to discover them -- rediscover them -- and these jewels are to be found in the depth of contemplation and wisdom that mystics like Meister Eckhart articulate for us. But he invites all of us to get to our own levels of depth and be the mystics that we are called to be, speaking from a place of mystery.

Thank you; we'll see you tomorrow.