

Daily Meditation 11/15/2021

The Value of Intuitive Wisdom and Religious Renewal

Good morning.

We've been meditating with the wonderful Father Bede Griffiths about the theme of deep ecumenism, which was a commitment on his part. And he was one of the pioneers in that regard.

And I want to tell you a personal story with Father Bede. We were friends. And near the end of his life, he came to visit in the Bay Area, and we spent some time together. And I told him about how I was working on my book called *Sheer Joy: Conversations with Thomas Aquinas on Creation Spirituality*. This is the book in its latest incarnation. And he offered to do me a great favor.

Being British and an Oxford grad, of course, he was very attuned to the beauty of the English language. And to make a long story short, I translated a lot of classic works that have never been in English before, or Italian or French or German--like his commentary on Pseudo-Denis, which was his first book, and his most mystical, cosmological book. And many of his commentaries on scripture: like The Psalms, which is a wonderful book, and Lamentations, and Isaiah, Jeremiah, and so forth. A lot of his books have been ignored for eight centuries.

But I read them all and I also descholasticized them by interviewing Aquinas instead of just making this a collection of his statements, declarations as such. But he said, he would like to help me because he loved Aquinas.

Aquinas actually converted him. He was an atheist when he graduated from Oxford as a young man. And he was living with some other young Oxford grads, all of whom were atheists. And he stumbled across Aquinas, and it blew his mind. And so he became a Christian. And CS Lewis was his mentor, as a Christian. And then he actually became a Catholic and a Benedictine monk.

So I gladly accepted his invitation to retranslate, or just make more of the Queen's English of my translations of Aquinas from Latin.

And I'll never forget, he was staying in a community in Berkeley, and I came to visit one day. And he had a big bed in his bedroom. And he was lying on his bed. And this is, you can see, a very long book. But there were piles of papers that made up this book in their typed format. The pile was so high.

So he was lying on his bed, with his long white beard, propped up by a couple of pillows. And he had this pile, this stack of my manuscript next to him. And he was going through it--every line of my translations. And he'd not only done it once; he did it twice. I mean, this is a real devotion to Thomas Aquinas, as well as a very great gift to myself that he did this.

But then Rupert Sheldrake, who is a common friend, because Bede met Rupert Sheldrake when he was a young scientist working in India, and they fell in love with each other.

Rupert had been an atheist for many years. And he didn't realize that Christianity had a mystical tradition at all, until he met Father Bede. And they became very fast friends. And Bede was thrilled to learn the New Science near the end of his life.

So Rupert did the foreword to my book on *Sheer Joy* and Father Bede did an afterword to it. And one of the points he makes in the afterword--in fact it's his last paragraph--he was very impressed, if you will, by the fact that Aquinas had a breakdown at the end of his life.

Aquinas died young at 49. But the last year of his life, he went utterly mute, didn't talk, put down his pen, didn't write. He hadn't finished his *Summa Theologica*, a great work. It's like an unfinished symphony. And he said that he had had this mystical experience and that everything he had written was straw. His whole life long all these books he had written were straw compared to what he experienced in his mystical experience.

Now, I think it's very likely he both had a burnout experience and a mystical experience. That happens. And, very likely, he may have had a stroke, too, actually.

But Bede makes a big point of this. He calls it "an unexpected personal drama in the life of the saint."

"This suggests that he underwent a mystical experience that transformed his being. After a passionate intellectual life, which experienced much opposition, his human nature suffered a psychological shock. Thus, Aquinas does not seem so remote from other men and women of genius who experienced similar psychological traumas. He remains a model of a philosopher who, after devoting his whole life to the study of the ultimate meaning of nature and the human world, had, at the end, to surrender himself to the divine mystery that transcends the world."

That surrender.

And again, he's getting to the mystery that is behind all these structures and all the work that we do to create the structures, to write the books, and do the research, and organize communities, and all the rest.

It's wonderful works, inspired works necessary work, but the mystery behind it is what Father Bede is pointing to. And it's a very important reminder for all of us.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.