

Daily Meditation 11/11/2021

Gandhi and Christianity according to Bede Griffiths

Good morning.

We're continuing our meditation with Father Bede Griffiths.

And today we're talking about Mahatma Gandhi and his observations about how Gandhi picked up on Christianity from Leo Tolstoy and Ruskin, and how he adapted Christianity: he listened deeply to what Jesus was saying.

And as from that "No" that Jesus spoke, that is the prophetic No of the Jewish prophets, that Gandhi himself, as he tells us "Learn to say no," he said, "I learned to say No from the West."

And Gandhi developed a method by which to say no, a method of resistance, of nonviolent resistance, which literally ejected the British Empire from his land, with no bloodshed.

And which, of course, both Howard Thurman and then Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. picked up on this method of nonviolent resistance, and brought it to the American scene to combat segregation and Jim Crow laws and the rest.

All of which is under fire again, one generation, two generations later, in dismantling of civil rights laws that were passed, at the expense of so much bloodshed, and struggle in the 1960s.

But one theme that Bede Griffiths picks up on, and Gandhi too, is this theme of sacrifice. Gandhi says that, if you want to prepare yourself for struggle for justice, you must expect mountains of suffering, that there is sacrifice involved.

So in his book, *The Cosmic Revelation*, Bede Griffiths talks about sacrifice.

He says in the Vedas, the sacrifice was the center of the whole religion. When you offer a sacrifice, your heart swells, you want to open yourself to God. And that's really the meaning of Brahman. It is about swelling, about growing.

Brahman cannot properly be named, it is without name or form. It is an inexpressible mystery.

He says that the reason that sacrifice was the center of the ancient religion in the Vedas is that we receive everything, but from above, you might say, from the heavens, and everything must be returned.

A sacrifice, see, Bede writes is the return to God. And sin is the opposite: the appropriation of something to oneself. It's saying, This is mine, I can do what I like.

But in fact, if everything is a gift, then we are responsible to return a gift, in exchange, in thanks for the gift. He says that applies to everything, to every person, and myself, I am not my own possession, I am a gift.

My being is a gift from God. I've got to return that gift. And sacrifice is the return.

And that's why the word sacrifice comes from two Latin words: to make holy, or to render holy. Its purpose is to make a thing sacred, which is to return it to God.

And he says the sacrifice was considered to be the source of life for the whole creation. The whole creation then depended on sacrifice: it came forth from God and returned to God.

That is the order, the rhythm of world: coming forth and returning to the divine. And humans assist that turning by offering sacrifice.

Now, the sacrifice in ancient days may have been an animal, or maybe the fruits of harvest and so forth. But of course, I think it's come to mean more and more of what we give of ourselves, and of our work, and of our commitment to one another. That is a sacrifice, it is a giveaway.

That is what the indigenous people call it in our country, the giveaway, and it is about nurturing our powers of generosity. And I do think under patriarchy, the word sacrifice is taken on a very shadowy meaning, where it usually means that you will sacrifice for me.

But what it really means is we are cheerfully giving thanks.

And we're giving something of ourselves to make holy, the continued project of creation, the ongoing wheel of the cosmos, as the Hindus talk about it, and as Hildegard of Bingen talked about it: that we make the wheels of the cosmos go around, by our work, by our attending to our work and our giving it as a gift to the community, and therefore to God.

Thank you, we'll see you tomorrow.