

Hinduism and Bede Griffiths, part 1

11/08/2021

Good morning.

This morning we're continuing our meditations on Hinduism and the Christian mystics in the context of our gathering in Glasgow to save the Earth as we know it; and to save our species, which is truly facing extinction if we do not transform profoundly in the next 10 years; and, of course, many other species. So, we're talking about some pretty serious stuff here.

And I've called in another champion of deep ecumenism and a real pioneer in that regard--Father Bede Griffiths, wonderful and saintly, very bright monk, a Benedictine monk who had an ashram in India for over 50 years.

So, we want to hear his voice. Just as we've been listening to the voices of Coomaraswamy, the Hindu scholar, and interacting with Meister Eckhart, the 14th century and late 13th century Christian mystic.

And Bede Griffiths in his meditation today has some powerful things to say about what he's learned from living in a Hindu culture, there for over 50 years. And he wrote some marvelous books about Hinduism and Christianity. But above all, he says, number one thing he's learned is how it's possible to recognize all nature, all creation as sacred. And that the West, which he knows well because he's an Englishman, has lost that sense of the sacredness of nature.

Now, he very much is echoing what the late Thomas Berry taught as a great eco-philosopher of our generation. This is what Thomas Berry says about the sacred. He says, and this is on page 361 of my *Christian Mystics* book:

"We will recover our sense of wonder and our sense of the sacred."

Notice he puts them together: wonder and the sacred, awe and the sacred. Remember, Rabbi Heschel says, "Awe is the beginning of wisdom." So, wisdom and the sacred.

"We will recover our sense of wonder and our sense of the sacred only, only, if we appreciate the universe beyond ourselves as a revelatory experience of that numinous presence whence all things come into being. Indeed, the universe is the primary sacred reality. We become sacred by our participation in this more sublime dimension of the world all about us."

So again, he's saying, like Bede is saying, and like Hinduism is saying, that we recover a sense of the sacred in the context of nature, but especially in the context of the whole of nature, which is the universe or the cosmos. And so the new creation story for science assists us in this waking up to the wonder, the reverence, the gratitude, and the sense of sacredness that is all of ours. It is what the mystics call the Via Positiva.

And in another passage, Thomas Berry celebrates how this is what's missing in our effort at saving the planet today. The stuff that's going on at Glasgow today could be missing this dimension of the sacred. He says, "Everywhere we find ourselves invaded by the world of the sacred." Invaded by the world of the sacred. "It's everywhere!"

Such was the experience of Thomas Merton.

"An absence of a sense of the sacred is a basic flaw in many of our efforts at ecologically or environmentally adjusting our human presence to the natural world. It has been said, 'We will not save what we do not love.' But it is also true that we will neither love nor save what we do not experience as sacred."

He says, "Instead of a sense of the sacred, we are fed, continually, a sense of how to exploit nature, how to make money on nature." And, of course, that's the real bottom line in Glasgow. If you're going to worship the idols and gods of capitalism, this runs directly up against the reality of the sacredness of nature--that nature is bigger than us and it tells us what to do. We're not here to tell nature what to do.

There is a co-creation that goes on with nature, of course, and we humans are nature; we're part of nature. But we also have this capacity to go beyond the rules, the laws of nature. And in the process, well, we may make short term gains. In the process long term...well, we're in that process right now--the crisis of climate change. In the long term, we are doing ourselves in, and doing many other species in as well. Extinction reigns in our time.

Thomas Berry says, "Eventually only our sense of the sacred will save us."

Eventually our sense of the sacred will save us. That is Bede Griffiths' teaching and it's certainly the teaching that he derived from living in a Hindu culture for many years.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.