

Daily Meditation 01/24/2022

Thich Nhat Hanh and Deep Ecumenism, continued

Morning.

We continue to meditate on the wonderful life and teachings, and holy passing, of Thich Nhat Hahn, Buddhist Vietnamese monk. And he makes some strong statements in today's meditation.

He says that "the valuable jewels in the Christian tradition will be rediscovered."

Now notice he's saying two things here: There are valuable jewels in the Christian tradition; and they need to be rediscovered. They've been buried. They've been lost. They've been overwhelmed by the modern consciousness that knew nothing about mysticism--couldn't even tolerate the word, much less include it in an understanding of human nature--a way of thinking that rejected and ejected what is essentially the right hemisphere of the brain--the brain of intuition, and of values, as Einstein insisted.

So, of course, I think the recovery of these tools is found when we recover the deeper spiritual traditions of the West; and, of course, the wonderful mystics. Because one of these mystics was Thomas Merton, a close friend of Thich Nhat Hanh.

The monk himself was awakened to the deeper jewels of Christianity by Meister Eckhart, by way of Dr. Suzuki, the Japanese Buddhist scholar who came to America and introduced North America to Zen.

Merton talks... and I'm reading now from my book, *A Way to God: Thomas Merton's Creation Spiritually Journey*. And Merton writes in his journal how he had two long talks with Suzuki.

"He's 94, bent, slow, deaf, but lively and very responsive. He likes Eckhart, as I already know from the book I got at the University of Kentucky several years ago. But he says that one cannot understand Buddhism until one meets it in this existential manner, in a person in whom it is alive."

And Dr. Suzuki, meeting him at 94, was such an incarnated living Buddhist. And of course, those of us who've met Thich Nhat Hanh have had the very same experience.

But Suzuki himself wrote in his important book called *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist* (the entire first chapter is about Meister Eckhart.) And he says this:

"In the following pages, I attempt to call the reader's attention to the closeness of Meister Eckhart's way of thinking to that of Mahayana Buddhism, especially of Zen Buddhism. When I first read--and, of course, it's more than half century ago--a little book containing a few of Mr. Eckert's sermons, they impressed me profoundly. For I never expected that any Christian thinker, ancient or modern, could or would express such daring thoughts as expressed in those sermons."

And, of course, in Merton's next to last book, called *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, he is again building it entirely around Eckhart. And he says, "Eckhart is the Christian mystic closest to Zen." And again, he says, "A fuller and truer expression of Zen in Christian experience was given by Meister Eckhart." And again, "Whatever Zen may be, however you define it, it is somewhere out there in Meister Eckhart."

So, both Merton and Dr. Suzuki were early enriched by their encounter with Meister Eckhart. And of course, Thich Nhat Hahn was enriched by his encounter with Thomas Merton.

So there's something very exciting going on here about the lineage of Eckhart, Thich Nhat Hanh, Merton, and Creation Spirituality. And no wonder. Thich Nhat Kanh says he is very excited about the encounter of Buddhism and Christianity at this time. But it will require, "a very drastic change in Christianity."

If we can bring into Christianity insight of interbeing and nonduality, we will radically transform the way people look at the Christian tradition. And the valuable jewels will be rediscovered in that tradition.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.