

Daily Meditation 01/18/2023

MLK Jr. and M. D. Chenu Critique Today's Economics

Good morning.

Today I share some teachings from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and also a French Dominican, Père Chenu, who was my mentor and who named the Creation Spirituality tradition for me when I studied with him in 1968 in Paris, at the university there, the Institut Catholique de Paris. We were meeting during the riots of students who brought down the De Gaulle government and of course, students were rioting all over the western world at that time, in Berkeley in Madison, Wisconsin in Germany; and certainly in Paris.

And I share this meditation in light of the news headlines this morning about how the richest 1% who they "Bagged 2/3 of \$42 Trillion of New Wealth since 2020."

So this leaves 99% of the world's population with essentially a pretty empty bag, in comparison. But how a 5% tax on the world millionaires and billionaires could raise almost \$2 trillion a year, enough to lift two billion people out of poverty.

But I share what both King and Chenu had to offer about the critical understanding of capitalism. Capitalism can be what we make it to be. And obviously, what we've been making it recently is for the few, of the few, by the few, and for the few.

And in America, we've been cutting taxes for the rich. And for the very rich, and there are still politicians who want to carry on that task of cutting taxes for the billionaires, as we've seen in recent revelations of tax returns of the ex-president. The very rich in this country get away with paying no taxes, or \$700 a year taxes.

But I want to point out that this thrust to reimagine our economic system has been going on now, certainly, in my lifetime by some wonderful people and bright minds. And I bring some of them together in my book on Meister Eckhart, the very last chapter called "Warriors for Ecological and Economic Justice," with the subtitle of "Meister Eckhart meets Dorothy Stang, Karl Marx, David Korten, Serge Latouche, Anita Roddick, and Howard Thurman." Because all of these people have some alternative proposals for an economic system that is fairer, a version of capitalism, if you will, that is much more human and humane on the one hand, but also ecological.

And it all goes together, doesn't it. The way we treat the Earth is the way our children and grandchildren will inherit the Earth, whether it is something beautiful and fruitful or whether it be depleted with the continuation of the demise of millions of species and all the rest, which will greatly diminish the quality of our children's and grandchildren's lives.

So to cite just a couple of people here: David Korten, page 221 of this book, says,

The old economy of greed and domination is dying. A new economy of life and partnership is struggling to be born. The outcome is ours to choose.

That one sentence, those two sentences, say a lot. Greed and domination. That's what was in the headline that I shared this morning. A new economy of life and partnership struggling to be born. Where will our energies be invested?

Anita Roddick, a success in her own right as a businesswoman -- she founded The Body Shop -- she says:

Why not improve life for the world's poorest first? It is it so impossible to move business from private greed to public good?

...from private greed to public good. That's the very language from Thomas Aquinas and from Père Chenu, and of Martin Luther King, Jr. too: the public good, the common good. This should be the goal of economics, not greed, whether it be private or structural greed, which has brought us to this place we're in today.

So there are people who are trying to rethink economics, and I highly recommend the work of David Korten, and Anita Roddick, and others. And I tried to bring them together in this last chapter of my book on Meister Eckhart.

And why Meister Eckhart? because Meister Eckhart says that everything... let me get it exactly right. He says:

The person who understands what to say about justice, and the just person, understands everything I have to say.

So in that sense it's more than the great mystics of all time; it's all about justice. So to be a mystic, to be a lover, is to be also a lover of justice, because justice allows love to flow; it creates structures that are fair enough that the waters of justice can flow through.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.