

Daily Meditation 01/31/2023

The Tao of Fierce Wisdom by Thomas Aquinas, Part II

Good morning.

We continue with the poem by Thomas Aquinas, put together by myself in my book, *The Tao of Thomas Aquinas. First Wisdom for Hard Times*. Each stanza is a title of a chapter in the book.

And early in the second part of the poem, we're dealing with deep ecumenism, aren't we?

Every truth without exception, and whoever utters it, is from the Holy Spirit.

So this opens the door up to all kinds of truth found in different cultures, and different religions, or different expressions of religion.

And he's explicit how revelation has been made to many pagans. And my guess is that among pagans and revelation he had Aristotle in mind, because Aristotle was so dear to Aquinas; he wrote ten books on Aristotle. And he says, "All pagan virtues are from God." So pagans are virtuous; they can be virtuous.

In another place, he says that there are prophets in every culture, every culture produces its prophets. Then he moves into the via negativa, the apophatic divinity:

Every being is a name for God and no being is a name for God. We are united to God as to One Unknown.

And this is really striking, especially coming from an intellectual as he was.

The greatest accomplishment of the human mind--

What is the greatest accomplishment of the human mind? --

...To know that it does not know who God is.

Well, that certainly silences and shuts up those who are sure they know who God is. And they stamp it in every coin and dollar bill and MX missile to prove it.

The greatest accomplishment of the human mind is to know it does not know who God is.

He's telling us to shut up about God. Meister Eckhart, who came right after him, very much supports this. He says,

The best thing you can say about God is nothing. Speak from that inner wealth of silence.

This is all an affirmation of the via negativa, the apophatic divinity, but I think it's so practical today, because we're in a new era of human consciousness. So the old namings of God have to slip away, and we have to be silent, pay attention to the new names that are going to emerge, that are emerging. They're emerging in science - I write about this at length in my book on *Naming the Unnameable: 89 Wonderful and Useful Names for God*.

So we have more names emerging, and of course, it's Thomas Aquinas himself, in this poem, right above, who says "Every being is a name for God. And no being is a name for God." Every being -- that's the cataphatic divinity of light, no being -- that's the apophatic divinity of mystery, and silence, and knowing what we do not know.

And he goes into meditation:

The first requirement of the contemplation of wisdom is to take complete possession of your mind before anything else does.

In other words, to enter into the emptying of the mind, the kenosis.

And I love this one:

It's a great thing to do miracles, but it is a greater thing to live virtuously.

That virtue takes a lot out of us, takes a lot from us anyway. And it's a miracle in itself to live virtuously.

The proper objects of the heart of truth and justice.

Notice, truth is in the heart. This is very different from Descartes saying it's in the head, and that your soul is in the pineal gland, which was Descartes' theory.

And the vision of God is arrived at through justice.

So justice is itself an act of contemplation: visions of divinity come through when you are working for justice and struggling and going to the edge and risking for justice.

Compassion is the fire that Jesus came to set on the earth.

Jesus came to set a fire, and that is compassion. And Aquinas delves very deeply into the topic of conscience. When I grew up, I thought Martin Luther invented the word *conscience* in the West. Five hundred years before Luther...well, three hundred years before Luther, Aquinas was going on and on about how important it is to have a conscience.

There's so much here that is rich, but I did want to skip down to the last one, the second-to-last one:

Christ is a dew for cooling, rain for making fruitful, a seed for bringing forth the fruit of justice.

And he develops that more. I have 34 different names for Christ, of which these are three; that he very much picks up on these gardening images, but it's just so refreshing to see Christ talked about as dew for cooling and rain for making fruitful, and the seed for bringing forth the fruit of justice, instead of some kind of king of the Empire or something.

It's very poetic, and I really steer you to that chapter in that book. I find it very moving, that he also talks about Christ as a doctor, as a physician, as a healer, and so much more. That takes him off the pedestal and down the ground where he lived and worked among people who were in need of healing.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.