

Daily Meditation 01/09/2023

The Historic Role that Pope Benedict Played

Good morning.

This morning we're meditating--it's kind of a final meditation--on the Pope Benedict story that occurred, obviously, this past weekend in Christmas season. I'm talking about the historic role that Pope Benedict played. And I really do believe that the Holy Spirit can make good out of evil and light out of darkness.

And I point out in today's essay that maybe a new thing can happen, that mystics and prophets can flourish as the structures and institutions and organization of religion becomes less and less significant. There's an empowerment that goes on at the grassroots level, for people to become their own mystics and their own prophets, surely within community, but not with overly important administrators dictating that the Spirit do its work.

Now I'd like to invoke a person who did that, Dorothee Soelle, who was from the same country as Benedict, Cardinal Ratzinger, in Germany. She was a little younger than he, but she was born and grew up there also during the War, Second World War. But she came to very different conclusions about the meaning of the war, however.

So here's one of her poems, called "Credo." And this is in my book, *Christian Mystics: 365 Readings and Meditations*.

And I might tell the story that I wrote this book when I was writing the book on Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Pope's War*. Because halfway through I was getting so depressed by what I was learning, I told a friend it was like living in a garbage can, on Sesame Street.

And so, I didn't think I could finish the book, or I just put it aside for a while and I started to write this book on mystics. Because the mystics bring the joy back to religion again, and the mystical side of dealing with the deepest experiences of our souls--both joy and suffering and darkness, but without blaming it on others.

So here is Dorothee Soelle, a wonderful mystic. She taught liberation theology and mysticism at Union Theological Seminary for ten years in New York. So this too puts her on a different path than Cardinal Ratzinger, because she very much supported values of liberation theology, and of mystics, and especially Meister Eckhart. She was a special devotee of Meister Eckhart. You know, the Beguines, the women. She was a feminist too.

So, her feminism, her love of liberation theology, of Meister Eckhart and Creation Spirituality (she often came to lecture at our school) all this puts her on another path than Cardinal Ratzinger.

So here's one of her poems called Credo. It's a creed, a creed, I believe.

"I believe in God, who did not create an immutable world, a thing incapable of change..."

(I wrote earlier in an essay this week about how it seemed to me that Pope Benedict had turned his back on the relativity that Einstein spoke of and instead wanted a rigid sense of religion and faith.)

*I believe in God who did not create an immutable world, a thing incapable of change.
Who does not govern according to eternal laws that remain inviolate
or according to a natural order of rich and poor,
of the expert and the ignorant, of rulers and subjects.
I believe in God who willed conflict in life and wanted us to change the status quo—
through our work, through our politics.*

So I think that is a fine statement of belief in a God that invites us to be participants and agents in changing the world, and changing it toward justice, changing it toward peace, changing it toward love.

And I think this is what I'm talking about here, that the work of Pope Benedict, I think actually clears the field for people like Dorothee Soelle--and all the rest of us, because we are all mystics and prophets--to step up, and to contribute and contribute joyfully, to the good news that Christmas represents, and so much else in the teachings and story of Jesus.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.