

Daily Meditation 06-10-24

From Orvieto: Aquinas and Teilhard

Good morning.

It's my privilege to be sharing with you today some thoughts from Aquinas and Teilhard de Chardin, how bringing them together, especially in a place like Orvieto, is a special blessing, because both of them are so keen on bringing religion and science together, and on overcoming the dualisms that make us suspicious about Nature. And of course, one dualism is that between Nature and Grace. And clearly, both are trying to meld that dualism as well.

Meister Eckhart did it wonderfully when he said, "Nature IS Grace." The idea of separating Nature and Grace was Augustine's idea, and takes us very far from the Jewish tradition of Jesus, where we're told in Genesis 1, first page of the Bible, that Creation is good, and all of Creation, with humans there too, is "very good."

So here are some thoughts from Aquinas, the Via Positiva of Aquinas, page 80-81 of my book *Sheer Joy*. He says that

God's creatures, we are all led to wonder at the divine power; and in this way, to hold God in reverence. The Maker is nobler than the things that are made. From wonder comes awe and reverence. Creatures have the capacity to warm our hearts, to love the goodness of God. All creatures confess that they are made by God. Human beings ask questions of creatures, when they consider them diligently. Just as someone looking at a book knows the wisdom of the writer, so when we see creatures, we know the wisdom of God.

That's from his commentary on the Psalms. "All natural things are produced by the Divine art, and so may be called God's work of art."

And then he takes up the biblical phrase,

The whole earth is full of God's glory. Why is this? Because, even to the farthest creatures which are known throughout the earth, God manifests the spreading of divinity's Goodness.

That's in his commentary on Isaiah. And of course it's Isaiah who says "The whole earth is full of God's glory."

And he quotes Isaiah again: "Lift up your eyes on high and see who created these things." He says,

Scripture is manifesting the power of God, just in consideration of the skies. Therefore, the Psalmist says, 'I will look in your skies at the work of Your fingers.'

Again, this from his commentary on the Psalms. And he talks about the beauty: “Rabbi Moses says, 'In their beauty, they reveal the Maker, and much more.’ “ And he quotes Job -- this is in his commentary on Matthew, actually:

Jesus teaches us to avoid anxiety by considering the birds of the sky, since there is wisdom from them. Also in Job, we read: 'Ask the cattle, and they will teach you.' (Job 12:7)

Then he goes on with the whole two pages about cattle and horses and all, in his commentary on Job. It's amazing, you get such a feel for his passion for Creation. And you can see why Aquinas says that “revelation comes in two volumes, Nature and the Bible.” That's a wonderful discourse on Nature, Aquinas's commentary on Isaiah and Job.

And finally, it's a question I raise in the essay, when he says, “they should be drunk with the beauty of thy house.” That's a quote from the Psalmist, that is, the Universe. It goes on: It says that

Being drunk means our desires will be filled beyond all measurement of merit. Our intoxication is a kind of excess. As the Song of Songs says, 'My Beloved, you are drunk with love.'

So love of the Universe gets us drunk, love of Creation, love of existence. And he says,

Ecstasy is another name for being drunk, because those who are drunk are not inside themselves, but outside of themselves.

So Aquinas, like Teilhard, was in love with Creation. And clearly we are all invited to be the same. And if we all were in that state of excess and love, we wouldn't be facing the climate change crisis that we're facing today. But with it, we are empowered to do something about it.

Thank you. We'll see you in a week.