

Daily Meditation 06-17-24

Happy Father's Day 2024—One Day Late! Aquinas as Spiritual Father

Good morning, and Happy Father's Day to all the fathers — one day late, I apologize. But as I said, may I say I was flying all day yesterday.

And in today's meditation, we are treating Thomas Aquinas as a spiritual father, which he certainly has been to me since I was 15 years old, and to many, many other people. And this is the 800th anniversary of his birth, 750th anniversary of his death.

But I'm not at all alone in having Aquinas as a spiritual father. To mention some other people in his own century, Mechthilde of Magdeburg, the Beguine, was very attuned to Aquinas. She had a Dominican as a spiritual director, who encouraged her and who assisted her in publishing her book, which was a journal that she kept all her adult life. And it's a beautiful piece of work, and her Dominican director assisted to get it translated into Latin very fast. So it circulated quite broadly.

And the fact that she was a Beguine is very important. That was the women's movement of the Middle Ages. So the leader in the women's movement was praising Aquinas as a helper in that movement as well. And of course, he was because he was so devoted to non-dualism.

Rosemary Ruether says that dualism is the foundation of patriarchy. That's why I call Aquinas a proto-feminist, because he broke with dualism, and that was the big step in women's consciousness.

And then, of course, there was Meister Eckhart, his Dominican brother, who was about 15 when he entered the Dominicans. And Aquinas was still alive then, but he died a year or two after Eckhart entered the Dominicans. Eckhart was very attuned to Aquinas, as were all the Dominicans, because they were fighting on his behalf, as three bishops — well, one condemned him twice, who was at Oxford, and another at Paris, where in fact, Aquinas taught for so many years. He condemned Aquinas after he died, because of his non-dualism, because of his stand on consubstantiality of body and soul, of matter and spirit, the equality of the two. Something that Teilhard de Chardin picked up on in the 20th century.

And of course, Dante. Dante's favorite teacher studied with Aquinas, so that's a direct connection. And Dante talking about how love moves the sun and the stars. That's Aquinas's cosmology.

And of course, Julian of Norwich was very influenced by Aquinas as well, and by Master Eckhart. The Dominicans were very strong in Norwich in the Middle Ages. And clearly they were being listened to by Julian. I think there's a likelihood that a Dominican was her spiritual director, and was feeding her ideas that she put into her own language, such as "All goodness is God."

And then in the 16th century, right at the beginning of the Renaissance, 16th-century Renaissance, there came Nicholas of Cusa. Kues is a town not far from Bingen (Hildegard of Bingen country in the Rhineland, just north of Bingen). And Cusa was a mathematician and scientist, as well as a cardinal in the Catholic Church. And in fact, we found the transcripts of Meister Eckhart's trial in Cusa's library in the 19th century. So there is a link there, between Aquinas's love of Aristotle as a scientist and Cusa's love of science. David Bohm, the 20th century physicist, says he owes more to Cusa than he does to Einstein, which is quite shocking, really.

And then, in our own time, not only Teilhard de Chardin, but Father Bede Griffiths. Father Bede graduated from Oxford as an atheist. And then joined a small community of Oxford grads who lived together, started to read Aquinas's "Summa Theologica." And this opened his mind and heart up, and he became a Christian. And C.S. Lewis became his mentor into Christianity. He became an Anglican, and then became a Roman Catholic, and joined the Benedictine Order, became a monk, and then moved to India, where he spent the next 50-plus years of his life. And he's one of the real pioneers between Hinduism and Christianity, among other things.

Then we have to also comment on his influence on Rupert Sheldrake. Because Rupert graduated from the University of Cambridge in science as an atheist, also. He went to India, northern India, and then learned about Father Bede, went and visited him, and Rupert had not known that there was a mystical tradition in Christianity. And with Bede, who introduced him to that, they became fast friends, and Rupert studied Aquinas. In fact, he wrote the foreword to my major book, *Sheer Joy: Conversations with Thomas Aquinas on Grace and Spirituality*. So Rupert wrote the foreword, and Father Bede wrote the afterword. So they cooperated on that project.

And of course, Thomas Berry. I heard Thomas speak probably 25 times in a lecture, and not once did he not quote Aquinas. He was very aware that Aquinas was his namesake, Thomas. But more than that, Aquinas, in his day, was trying to bring science and spirituality together, as Thomas was doing in our day. And Brian Swimme, his colleague and mine, was very moved by Aquinas all his adult life.

So these are just a few examples of those who were touched deeply by Aquinas. And in addition, you have to say, then, well, if Aquinas influenced Eckhart, which he surely did, what about all the people that Eckhart influenced, including Karl Marx, and Carl Jung, who said he owes to

Eckhart the key to the unconscious? And Thomas Merton, who was converted by Meister Eckhart in 1958. And Dr D.J. Suzuki, who brought Zen to North America, loved Meister Eckhart. And there would have been no Meister Eckhart without Thomas Aquinas. And even Thich Nhat Hanh says his favorite name for God is “ground of being,” which he got from Paul Tillich. But Paul Tillich got it from Meister Eckhart.

So you can see that the impact of Thomas Aquinas has been very, very great, directly and indirectly. And so we are appropriately celebrating him on this Fathers' Day feast day. So happy feast day, fatherhood to all the fathers in the world, including our ancestors like Thomas Aquinas.

Be well. See you next week.