

Daily Meditation 10/20/2021

Deep Ecumenism: Thich Nhat Hanh on Jesus, the Buddha, and Us

Good morning.

In today's sermon we're calling on both Thich Nhat Hanh and Meister Eckhart, and both are talking about how we are other Christs or other Buddhas.

In fact, years ago, when I invited Thich Nhat Hanh to my university to speak along with 40 of his nuns and monks, we were sitting together in a circle. He was on my right, and before we began in the back room, or green room, I guess you'd say, he said to me very quietly, as he often talked very quietly, he said, "You know the Vatican calls me the antichrist" -- meaning him.

Now this was of course under previous popes, not the present pope. And I said "Oh," I said, "I wouldn't worry about that." I said, "I've read your two books on Christ, and you know more about Christ than they do." And with that he started tapping my leg with his hand, and he kept tapping my leg with it, didn't stop, he kept going. And I realized what a horrible experience this was for him, to be accused by a Christian chief of being the antichrist -- this sensitive monk who devoted his whole life to inner work and outer work. And it was a very powerful experience; I've never forgotten.

But here I have been quoting his thoughts about Jesus and our being other Christs, as well as other Buddhas, in today's Daily Meditation.

So I'm going to call now in this sermon -- there's an amazing Sermon, number 24 in my book *Passion for Creation: The Earth-Honoring Spirituality of Meister Eckhart*, where we produce 37 of his sermons and writings, and with a commentary after each.

In sermon 24, called "We are Other Christs," Eckhart begins with the quote from Luke's gospel: "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you." But in fact Jesus said, "No, rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it."....hear the word of God and keep it. So even more important than physical motherhood is taking in the word of God and keeping it.

So here are a few of his teachings. In the sermon, he says:

"Consider carefully: our Heavenly Father himself hears nothing but the Word, knows nothing but the same Word, speaks nothing but the Word, and begets nothing but the Word. In this Word the Heavenly Father hears himself, begets himself, knows himself in his essence and all that he is, and knows the Word as of the same nature in a distinct person."

He goes on:

"God the Creator speaks naturally. In this Word the Father speaks my spirit, your spirit, and the spirit of every person who resembles the Word. And in this utterance you and I are true sons of God, as the Word himself is Son of the Father."

So that's one fine example of Eckhart's teaching: we are true sons of God, and daughters, as the Word is Son of the Father. And he says that we become fruitful when we dwell with this sense of the Word of God in our souls.

And that Christ himself is the grain of wheat that falls into the soil, and that we are to follow the grain of wheat. The noble soul, Christ, dies in view of peace and quietness. That what we give birth to is so rich when we do this dying that the seed does in the soil.

So all these are examples of Eckhart's affirmation of what Thich Nhat Hanh is talking about: how we are all other Buddhas and all other Christs.

Of course Eckhart is not alone in this awareness. Thomas Merton talks about this; Dorothy Day talks about our being other Christs.

But Eckhart emphasizes work. He says it's not just enough we know the Christ. He says we need to do the works of Christ and behave exactly like Jesus. This is not a sentimental identification with Christ -- "we must also be the same Christ, imitating him in his actions, for our humanity and Christ's humanity are in one substance of the Eternal Being."

He says, "Many people follow Christ like a falcon follows a woman carrying tripe or sausages, or wolves follow a carcass or fly. It is against these that Christ says, Follow Me. Follow is a command to act.".... "follow" is a command to act.

And so he talks about the pattern that Christ sets for us.

"A person ought to transform himself or herself inwardly into our Lord Jesus Christ in all things, and in our works and actions. A perfect imitation, so far as we can, of all our Christ works."

So it's not just a matter of being another Christ; it's a matter of acting. And of course this leads to the theme of compassion.

Thank you; we'll see you tomorrow.