

Daily Meditation 11/12/2021

Bede Griffiths on the Pressing Need for Deep Ecumenism

Good morning.

We continue our meditations on the wonderful work and deep ecumenism done by Father B. Griffith in his lifetime, living for over 50 years in an ashram in India.

And I'm going to share with you some teachings from his wonderful book, *The Marriage of East and West*, with the foreword by the Dalai Lama. And this book was first written in 1976.

He's talking here about the externals of religion, and how, as useful and important as they are, the externals of religion, they are not the essence of religion. He says,

"All the externals of religion, rituals and sacrifices, priesthood and temple, are external signs, intended to awaken faith, to enable the person to pass from the external law of appearances to the inner law of the Spirit. It is the same in all religions."

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"That's so important: that we realize that every religion has its structures, and its practices of its laws. But these are not the heart of the matter."

"Christianity itself," he said, "soon came to develop a ritual and a sacrifice, a church and a priesthood, an organization of ever greater complexity,"

(no question about that!)

"But this system of laws, like every other system, is conditioned by time and history, by external circumstances and events. And like all such systems, it is destined to pass away."

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I remember once, Father Bede told me...we were friends, and it was shortly after the Berlin Wall came down. And I was in a rather public...what should I say? disagreement?...with the Vatican.

And he said to me, "Oh, don't worry about the Vatican. Don't even look over your shoulder." He said, "The whole thing is going to come tumbling down one day, just like the Berlin Wall." He said, "Keep nurturing the new shoots that you're doing, and don't slow down."

So he was applying this teaching from 1976, to around 1989, when we had that conversation, so he means what he says.

And he expresses himself so directly, so simply, without a lot of harangue or anything like that, quite unemotionally. He's very, very factual in his recognition that all things are impermanent, including religious things.

He says, "A visitor to Rome, seeing the magnificent building of St. Peter's, might well be inclined to say, 'Look, teacher, what wonderful stones and wonderful buildings!' and be told: 'Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.'"

And of course, he's quoting Jesus in the New Testament.

And then he ends this paragraph saying, "Such is the fate of all earthly religion."

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He points out that in the great, eschatological book that ends the New Testament, the book of Revelation, there's an image, there's a vision of a holy city, the New Jerusalem.

Here he says, "The myth of the earthly Jerusalem is finally dissolved. And Jerusalem is seen for what it is: a symbol of God's dwelling, abundant among people."

He quotes: "Behold, the dwelling of God is with people. God will draw with them and they should be God's people and God, the God Self will be with them."

He says, "It is significant there is no temple in the heavenly city."

And he cites that scripture: "I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God, the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it. For the glory of the Lord is this light, and his lamp is the Lamb."

And Bede comments, "One is reminded of the great saying from the Upanishad: 'The sun shines not there, nor the moon, nor the stars, nor lightning, much less earthly fire; where he shines, everything shines after him. And by his light, all these are lighted.'"

So he's making deep connections between the Hindu tradition and the Christian tradition, about the passing of our structures.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.