

Daily Meditation 04/24/2022

Our Sacred Earth: Thomas Merton Meets Rachel Carson

Good morning.

For several daily meditations, we have been sharing reflections and meditations on the upcoming Earth Day celebration. And now, several days after that celebration, continuing to reflect on Earth Day, sacred Earth, our sacred Earth.

And today I bring into the conversation, the brilliant soul, Thomas Merton. And we hear about his letter to Rachel Carson 1962, when her iconic book *Silent Spring* came out, which many people equate with the launching of the environmental movement.

So think about that: 1962 is really the awakening of the environmental movement.

And as Monica Weiss points out, in today's meditation, the first response to Rachel Carson was very, very negative. A lot of name-calling coming from academia--imagine that--and from patriarchy. They didn't want women's values to this place, the money being made on DDT. (laughs) I apologize for laughing but you either have to laugh or scream.

And I think it's very striking what Weiss says, that she was targeted in a vicious and financially underwritten campaign. Now that's something we still have with us, don't we? Many decades after 1962, today the vicious dark money campaigns that are everywhere. Thanks to the Supreme Court, of course, opening the door to dark money in our politics.

She was vilified as an hysterical female, a pseudo scientist, probably a communist. Sorry. Yeah, that was 1962. "A bird and bunny lover" --doesn't that sounds like an awful thing to be (laughs)--"and a charlatan researcher."

That was the immediate response to Carson's book, but not from Thomas Merton. Living in a monastery, he immediately--first of all, he read the book immediately and wrote her a two-page letter in January, thanking her and telling her that they were already applying her criticisms and her vision to the way they were conducting the business of agriculture at the monastery.

And, in his typical fashion, he goes deeper. And he says, "I would almost dare to say that the sickness is perhaps a very real and very dreadful hatred of life." And I think I rightly pointed out, "Wow, that's Adrienne Rich, characterizing patriarchy as carrying fatalistic self-hatred."

So yes, Rachel Carson was taking on patriarchy. That wasn't her purpose. She was just trying to reveal the interconnectivity in nature and our need to defend it and defend Mother Earth. But in doing so, she had to unpack a fatalistic self-hatred, a dreadful hatred of life, as Merton calls it.

Now, Monica Weiss, who's written a very fine book on Merton and the environmental movement, also says that his letter to Carson "shows a revelation of his long held incarnational vision that acknowledges the divine spark in all creation, making each creature holy and worthy of respect."

Now that phrase, "the divine spark" was very important to Meister Eckhart. And he tells us that 13 different sermons that he got it from Avicenna, the Muslim philosopher: "the divine spark in all of us." It's also very important in the Kabbalah, the great Jewish, medieval, mystical book.

And then Monica Weiss goes on, "Having focused his social justice writing on right relationship among people, topics of racism, the rights of indigenous people, the dangers of atomic energy and technology, as well as a moral imperative for making peace through nonviolent means, is articulating a new insight: responsibility for the Earth."

Responsibility for the Earth.

So Thomas Merton got on the train with Rachel Carson in 1962--about stewardship for the Earth, responsibility for the Earth, and saving Mother Earth. He was in the first generation of environmentalists. And part of this is his recognition--which you learned from Meister Eckhart--about the spark of divinity that is found in all things. But Eckhart learned it from Avicenna, a Muslim philosopher.

I think this is good information for us, in our time, to carry on the work of the environmental revolution. And it is a respect for the spark in all beings, the goodness in all beings, but also in ourselves.

Let's get that spark cookin', let's ignite that spark on behalf of Mother Earth.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.