

Daily Meditation 01/25/2023

MLK & Chenu on the “Creative Maladjustment” Creativity Requires

Good morning.

In today's meditation we are reflecting on both Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Père Chenu on the theme of creative maladjustment, the phrase which Dr. King came up with.

I'm going to share with you a wonderful book with that as a title, *Creatively Maladjusted: The Wisdom Education Movement Manifesto*, written by Theodore Richards, a current philosopher and activist who was a director of my YELLAWE program in Oakland, a program for inner city youth, for two years, and then he returned to Chicago, where he started this program called The Chicago Wisdom Project. And now there's a Baltimore Wisdom Project and they are expanding nationally with these wisdom projects, but a lot of his work and mine is parallel. We did work together for two years.

But I'm going to share with you what he says about this phrase that is so integral to today's meditation, "creative maladjustment." He writes on page xx, in its introduction:

While I love Dr. King's 'I Have a Dream' speech, my favorite quote of his is this: 'Human salvation lies in the hands of the creatively maladjusted.'

For King, salvation is not something individualistic, or entirely distinct from the world, but a process whereby we discover ourselves as enmeshed in a community in which our faith cannot be separated from anyone else's. Salvation for Dr. King is communal--

...and this is absolutely the case with Père Chenu too, as we've been seeing in our recent meditations...

...And it is not by conforming to society that we find salvation, but by transforming it.

And of course, conforming to society would be adjusting to what is, to the status quo, whereas transforming it implies that we creatively maladjust and change society from within. He goes on:

The most radical concept in the quote is the term 'creatively maladjusted.' For King, like any prophet, the highest calling is not conformity to society's norms. If we are maladjusted to a corrupt system, our task is not to become 'well adjusted,' but to use our maladjustment as a creative, not a destructive, force.

And then he goes on to talk about his primary passion which is

...education for our school system, which like pretty much any school system serves the primary purpose of conformity.

And of course the struggle by King to fight un-civil rights and to bring about civil rights was of course, as he says,

To be maladjusted to such a system (the dehumanizing system of segregation and racism) was not something to be fixed. Rather, maladjustment was a reasonable moral response. There is such a thing as destructive maladjustment, but, to fix the system is constructive, transformative, salvific maladjustment, or refusal to adjust.

He says,

Our educational system today is as broken as Jim Crow. To succeed in such a system one must participate in a dying culture.

And so, bringing of new values is a creative act of standing up to adjustment to an unfair system; it is creative maladjustment. This is what prophets do. All this is very much in the mindset of Père Chenu, who said things like this regarding his own society during and after the Second World War and regarding Europe itself: to transform, not to accept, what is.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.