

Daily Meditation 03/21/2023

Aquinas, Eckhart, Heschel and Hart on Holy Existence

Good morning.

Today we continue our meditations on Being. And I think one observation from David Bentley Hart is very real and very practical when he says that we're so busy dealing with *beings* in our culture that we don't think of *Being*.

And Being itself is the miracle. That's what the poet Rilke says: existence is a miracle. So it's true, beings can overwhelm our awareness, and it's everywhere, it's not just looking outdoors, but looking in the mirror, being in nature.

But of course, humans are constantly birthing beings of our imagination, for example, on film and television and the rest, so there's no question that a lot of beings are out there.

But to strip it down to the issue of Being and existence and the miracle of it all -- that's something we spend little time with.

I used to tell our students to meditate on an empty chair, put into that empty chair all your relatives, your brothers and sisters that were never born. Never had Being, if you will. And in that meditation you get into an experience of non-being and of nothingness. And you sit with that for a while, with all your brothers and sisters who were never born.

And you begin to appreciate the fact that you are here, maybe with other siblings, real brothers and sisters who were born. And that's one way of getting into the topic of the value of Being.

So the meditation today begins with the statement from Thomas Aquinas: "To exist is the most perfect thing of all, for compared to existence, everything else is potential." And all this non-being is everywhere. There's a lot of it, more non-being, than Being.

And when you can begin to appreciate Being, including your own Being, that is when reverence and gratitude can rise. Or as we say, something good happens. You have to pinch yourself to sure that you're really here, that this is really happening.

And Eckhart talks about God as a "fountain of Being" and creation as a giving of Being.

Now, I cite Abraham Joshua Heschel here, too, for a very, very important point he makes, and I'll quote: *Creation is not an act that happened once upon a time, once and forever. The act of bringing the world into existence is a continuous process--*

...a continuous process., and a 13.8-billion year process, we can now say with science's discoveries.

God called the world into being, and that call goes on. Every instant is an act of creation.

That's Heschel's understanding, that's the Jewish understanding of creation: it's still going on.

It's also very much the understanding of my mentor, Père Chenu, who was a French Dominican and who named the creation spirituality tradition for me. But he develops the idea of what he calls "continuous creation"

... continuous creation.

This is exactly what Heschel is talking about. Now, Chenu did not cite Heschel on this, but they're absolutely on the same wavelength. So this is evidence, I think, of Chenu's groundedness and rootedness in Jewish theology and biblical theology,

Chenu also talks about "continuous incarnation" and how continuous creation and continuous incarnation go together, that the visit, if you will, of divinity to this world and to human history is still going on. It's still going on. It's not just an event of 2000 years ago.

So this way of looking at the world in terms of the presence of the divine and the presence of divinity becoming human flesh and entering human history -- this is at the foundation of our seeing the world in a way of reverence, gratitude, in the presence of the divine glory or doxa all among us.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.