

Daily Meditation 4/01/2023

Finally! Vatican Repudiates Doctrine of Discovery

Good morning.

This morning we're meditating on an important moment in the history of religion in the West. And I entitled our meditation "Finally! The Vatican Repudiates Doctrine of Discovery."

So I've been writing about the Doctrine of Discovery for some time. And I have a major section on it in my recent book on Julian of Norwich. Because I ask at the end of my book, and in the introduction, how history might have been different if European Christians in the 16th century had followed Julian of Norwich's theology, which was about the goodness of creation--that begins with the goodness of creation instead of the patriarchal and pessimistic version of religion that begins with the idea that first everyone has to be saved, and that Christ is the only path to salvation.

And what two Popes did in three different bulls, which are papal documents in the 15th century, was to give a green light to Christian kings and queens of Portugal and then Spain, to raid Africa for slaves and to raid the Americas, taking booty and slaves back to Europe.

And what right did they have to do this according to the papal bulls, because Africans and people living in the Americas were not Christian, whereas the Portuguese and Spanish royalty supposedly were Christian. I say "supposedly" because it's not Christian to kidnap people of other religions in the name of empire or anything else.

Now this really lays bare the history of this doctrine of discovery. It just lays bare the price we pay for defining religion, first as salvation, first as redemption. When, in fact, your first step of religion is about gratitude.

As Thomas Aquinas says, the essence of religion is gratitude, supreme gratitude--gratitude for existence, gratitude for the earth, gratitude for all the good things, the blessings that life offers. And now we can put it in a cosmic context with today's science of 13.8 billion years of gifting, blessing and goodness that has made life possible on Earth.

If you skip over this first dimension of religion, which is gratitude, the Via Positiva, and go right into the notion that we have to be saved, that there's only one way to salvation, which is another mistaken theological dogma in the West, we skip over that first meaning of religion. Then we create a circumstance where one group of people thinks they're anointed by God to enslave other people, to

control them, and to steal from them, and even to steal their children and put them into schools hundreds of miles from their families and their culture; and deprive them of their culture.

So much happens when you ignore Julian's creation-centered theology, where she talks so profoundly about the goodness of creation, how God is the goodness in nature.

And if Europeans and Latin America sat down with indigenous people to talk about how they teach their children about the goodness of creation and how Europeans teach their children about the goodness of creation, there would not have been a slaughter, there would have been a very different history to look back on.

Hopefully this decision by Pope Francis will begin a new relationship of indigenous people and Christian people and others in our struggle for mutual survival and mutual wisdom.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.