

Daily Meditation 06-02-23

Beauty, Politics and Justice: From Gandhi to bell hooks and more

Good morning.

We're meditating this morning on the relation between beauty and justice, the relationship which Mahatma Gandhi made explicit when he said "the aim of all I was doing was real beauty, real beauty."

But in today's meditations, I call on a number of wise people who contribute to this conversation, Simone Weil and Kenji Mayasawa, and Arturo Paoli, bell hooks and others, Audrey Lorde.

Dr. King put it this way. He said, when he was working to educate the black ministers of Birmingham about the movement, the civil rights movement, he said,

*I stressed the need for a social gospel, to supplement the gospel of individual salvation. I suggested that only dry-as-dust religion prompts a minister to extol the glories of Heaven, while ignoring the social conditions that cause people an earthly hell. I asked how the neighbor would ever gain his freedom without the guidance, support and inspiration of his or her spiritual leaders.*

So the struggle to connect the spirituality to justice making. And if you will take it out of church buildings, and institutional religion, this breaking through that barrier was a big part of the success that was ultimately achieved in the civil rights movement.

Now Gandhi said this, he said: "Nature and society are both subject to a single law, a law of justice and unity."

And Gandhi criticized Augustine, who separated them, and made a dualistic distinction between nature and society, between so-called secular and profane politics. Gandhi complained about Augustine's distinction. He said, that means that "the political order could never be elevated, it can only be endured."

And this is a big difference between St. Thomas Aquinas and Augustine also, that Aquinas believed that, indeed, the political order can be elevated and should be, that it can be a source of grace for people. That's a noble vocation, to enter politics, and a beautiful one, or it can be.

But that, again, the Augustinian dualistic, heavily Platonic tradition, based on the dualism of matter, made distinct from spirit, that this sets the political sphere to be simply endured.

And it turns out that Gandhi had a similar struggle in India, that there was a tradition of pursuit of individual salvation through austerities and prolonged contemplation, that ignore the practical needs of a society. And he complained that men are more concerned with escaping the world, than with altering the conditions of the world.

So this is a familiar struggle that occurs in religions around the world. And it is very important, therefore, that we realize the mindset of Gandhi and the mindset of King, and others, and then of course of Jesus, who took on the powers that were negative, the imperial powers of Jesus' day in Rome -- but invite people to do that in their own time, in our own time. And in our own circumstances.

This too is the work of scripture and of spirit.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.