

Concluding Philosophical Reflections

Dr. Dissmeyer, May 15, 2007

Since a significant amount of time has been spent by me, by you as students and by the class together, it would be helpful to reflect on the underlying assumptions in my opinion and through my efforts that have been at work within our discussions and studies of the world's great religious traditions.

1. Life is truly deeper than we usually think, much deeper than a casual or shallow reading, much more colorful and diverse than we sometimes imagine. Thus truth, wisdom and beauty can indeed be found in other cultures, other traditions, other religious world views, and not only where we are born or raised or how we traditionally believe.
2. Almost everyone can do something, can do more, to create a more peaceful future for all humankind...and they can do this right where they live and function. The Christopher Society motto states, "It is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness." So each of us can find candles to light.
3. We are as human beings all interconnected far more than we know or understand. The future of our own existence and that of our children depends greatly upon our proactive and compassionate global partnership between all the religious traditions and their secular colleagues. Such partnership implies a common and active effort to improve human relationships between and among religions...and such effort is urgently required NOW and in all foreseeable present moments of our lifetime.
4. Available and alternative next steps for students of world religions include:
 - a. Keep reading and studying something from all of the traditions... especially materials from Diana Eck, Huston Smith, Karen Armstrong and Ninian Smart.
 - b. Continue to ask questions and refuse to be satisfied with simplistic, illogical, destructive, shallow or sick answers which obstruct and do not contribute to world peace among all religions and all peoples...
 - c. Stay open to methods of deeper listening and more respectful discussions and dialogue with persons who are unlike ourselves...
 - d. Affirm one's own religious tradition with commitment and faithfulness while expecting from it healthy growth and refusing to allow it to develop sick and destructive relationships with our fellow human beings...
 - e. Review periodically the actual reasons for and the outcomes of:

+mysticism	+spirituality	+syncretism
+fundamentalism	+relativism	+legalism
+sectarianism	+sick religion	+healthy ethics

f. Consider the religious and social damages and opportunities that exist from the impacts of:

**-technological revolution
-women's movement
-racial equality
-economic globalization
-Third World disruption**

**-medical breakthrough's
-youth movements
-increasing Democracy
-ecological crisis today
-militarism and violence**

g. Remember that every religious tradition offers both gifts (contributions) and what could be called "ungifts" (or ideas and negative tendencies that would definitely not contribute to a better world for all of us). There are in human history both exceptional heroes like Gandhi and Elie Wiesel and human criminals like Hitler, Idi Amin and Pol Pot. REMEMBER THAT ALL OF THESE ARE INCREASINGLY AVAILABLE TO EVERYONE IN THE GLOBAL SUPERMARKET TO CHOOSE OR TO AVOID DEPENDING UPON OUR BASIC VALUE SYSTEM AND RELIGIOUS AFFINITY AND COMMITMENT TO A BETTER FUTURE FOR ALL.

5. My basic goal in teaching this course is to offer each participant the philosophical opportunity to become better questioners and "dialoguers", more responsible researchers, more informed consumers of religious ideas and finally more conscious ethical decision-makers. Measuring me by these goals, I wonder how would you grade me as your instructor?

***6. The world stands out on either side,
No wider than the heart is wide;
Above the world is stretched the sky,-
No higher than the soul is high.
The heart can push the sea and land
Farther away on either hand;***

***The soul can split the sky in two,
And let the face of God shine through.
But East and West will pinch the heart
That cannot keep them pushed apart;
And he whose soul is flat - the sky
Will cave in on him by and by.***

-Edna St. Vincent Millay

7. During the past thirty years, people from all the civilized countries of the earth have consulted me...Among all my patients in the second half of life – that is to say, over thirty-five – there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life. It is safe to say that every one of them fell ill because he had lost that which the living religions of every age have given to their followers, and none of them has been really healed who did not regain his religious outlook.

-Carl Jung

8. Religion is what the individual does with his own solitariness. It runs through three stages, if it evolves to its final satisfaction. It is the transition from God the void to God the enemy, and from God the enemy to God the companion. Thus religion is solitariness; and if you are never solitary, you are never religious.

-Alfred North Whitehead