

MONDAY, JULY 9, 2012

## The Age of Resentment



University students often, speak to me of their “despair” and “fear” as they contemplate the future of the modern world.

They are nauseated and dread-full of the culture, idiocy, deadness, absurdity of materialist consumerism.

How to teach them that “the joy-of-life is in the living,” -- the act of living?

The acts that benefit life are in themselves meaningful, fulfilling, satisfying, conducive of happiness, contentment, and peace. We don't need, nor can we attain, satisfaction from the “results” of our actions, from implementing or imposing our agendas on the world, from getting the results we want.

The achievement of a meaningful life is in meaningful living.

Especially for us who are working for a “paradigm shift” – working to change the world – to overthrow the present order of the world – to turn the world upside down.

We must realize that what we do is insignificant, but it is important that we do it.

Thomas Merton said something useful about this:

“Do not depend on the hope of results... You may have to face the fact that your work will be apparently worthless and achieve no results at all, if not perhaps the opposite results to what you expect. As you get used to this idea, you start more and more to concentrate not on the results but on the value, the rightness, the truth of the work itself... As gradually you struggle less and less for an idea and more and more for specific people. The range tends to narrow down, but it gets much more real. In the end, it is the reality of personal relationships that saves everything.”

“You are fed up with words, and I don't blame you. I am nauseated by them sometimes. I am also, to tell the truth, nauseated by ideals and causes... It is so easy to get engrossed with ideas and slogans and myths that in the end one is left holding the bag, empty, with no trace of meaning left in it. And then the temptation is to yell louder than ever in order to make the meaning be there again by magic...”

“The big results are not in your hands or mine, but they suddenly happen. And we can share in them: but there is no point on building our lives on this personal satisfaction, which may be denied us and which after all is not that important.

“The greatest thing after all is to live, not put your life in the service of a myth... If you can get free from the domination of causes and just serve... Truth, you will be able to do more and will be less crushed by the inevitable disappointment, frustration and confusion....”

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Images are evil. But images are all we have now. We were born modern.

America has no history. America is concrete, active, speed, forward looking, productive, optimistic, pragmatic, idealistic, restless. America no “place” – no roots.

Because we Americans have no history, no knowledge, no experience, we were born modern.

The American Dream is a smiling hallucination of advertisements, of new improved manikin smiles. America is Disney Land with a death penalty.

So America needs to “wake up” from its hallucination, and needs contemplatives to sit right down in the traffic of zooming rush hours, among the skyscrapers scaffolding; sit ZEN in the cacophony of the Bus Horn Concerto – and STOP MODERN MAN. In my humble opinion.

Modern secular man hates himself, cannot stand to be “with” or “by” himself – is alienated from his own mental, interior life – absorbed, transfixed by the computer screen – externals, sensations, technology, materialism.

Modern man is alienated from nature, from his own inner life. He has betrayed himself, has “sold his soul.”

Modern man’s self-hatred is due to his betrayal of his inner nature; due to his alienation – his disconnection from inwardness, nature, spirit, dharma. Christians would say this alienation is due to betrayal of man’s divine nature, betrayal of grace.

He fills his inner life with “stuff” to fill up the emptiness. He “stuffs” himself, through consuming.

Modern man creates an “image” to replace the “true self” that he has lost.

He gave away “reality” and inner “truth” for the illusion, for *simulacra*, for the society of the spectacle, the image...and now he is “lost in the funhouse”, he is lost in the masquerade of post-modern life.

Modern people feel guilty because we are guilty.

And we “stuff” ourselves to become jaded; to become insensitive to the sorrow of this knowledge; “Stuffing” ourselves in both senses of the word: (1) incorporating, eating ourselves to death; and (2) assimilating, accumulating more and more “stuff” in mindless consuming.

We are what we eat. We are the world, and we eat the world.

Alienated from his own mental, interior life, modern man is absorbed, transfixed by externals, sensations, materiality.

The philosopher Descartes planted the seeds of modern individualism, with his philosophy “Cogito ergo sum” – “I think therefore I am.” He starts with the self-centred “self”, and works outward to understand the cosmos (Dharma/god) as “object” of objective experience.

But Dharma/god is not an object, not a thing, or “being.” God is not another “being” and there is nothing out there. And this absence is experienced as a presence.

So modern man put the “self” in the place of the god, the Dhamma.

We become sick of this charade and deception, and are filled with resentment and revenge, and “self-destruction.” Modern man will destroy civilization out of revenge for this meaningless life he feels trapped in.

Regeneration, reawakening to our sense of “connection” to nature, our sense of “belonging” in the world, is our only way forward. Re-embodiment of our own inner lives through meditation is the only way to liberate ourselves from this dilemma, this looming catastrophe.

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In the Japanese edition of *The Seven Storey Mountain*, Thomas Merton said that modernism, with its “ideology of matter, power, quantity, movement, activism, and force... is the source and expression of the spiritual hell which man has made of this world, the hell which has burst into flames in two total wars of incredible horror, the hell of spiritual emptiness and sub-human fury which has resulted in crimes like Auschwitz and Hiroshima. This I must reject with all the power of my being. This all sane men must reject. But the question is: how can he sincerely reject the effect if he continues to embrace the cause?”

The practice of the contemplative life, meditation, cuts through the conditioning of modernism, and “is a radical liberation from the delusions and obsessions of modern man and his society,” Merton said.

“It is my intention to make my entire life a rejection, a protest against the crimes and injustices of war and political tyranny which threatens to destroy the whole race of men and the world with him. By my monastic vows and life, I am saying NO to all the concentration camps, the aerial bombardments, the staged political trials, the judicial murders, the racial injustices, the economic tyrannies, and the whole socioeconomic apparatus which seems geared for nothing but global destruction in spite of all its fair words in favour of peace.”

This rejection of modernism, the modern world, is an affirmation, a “yes” to nature, to the natural world.

“If I say No to all these secular forces, I also say Yes to all that is good in the world, and in man. I say Yes to all that is beautiful in nature....”

The change we need is deeper, more profound, than political change. It is a change of heart, a change of consciousness, that is necessary.

“We will never see the results in our time...[We need] a total and profound change in the mentality of the whole world...a complete change of heart and totally new outlook on the world of man....”

The basic problem is not political. It is a-political and human. We must recognize the primacy of the spiritual, that the person is not ‘post-human’.