

ANTHONY DeMELLO AND BUDDHISM

The basic system taught by the Jesuit priest, Anthony DeMello as evinced in his book, Awareness, is that you need to reduce your needs. You need to sense that you need nobody to be happy. You need to see that happiness is not thrills. You need to not to expect other people to treat you well.

All that is pragmatism and not spirituality though he disguises it as the latter.

One of the systems that led him to work all that out was Buddhism. The Buddha made meditation the indispensable element of his system. For DeMello, all we need to be happy and enjoy self-esteem is just to give up our selfish attitudes. That would be a slow process as attitudes are formed by habit. There is no need for meditation in the DeMello system. It may be done but is not indispensable. DeMello shows that Buddha was wrong. Meditation is okay as a help to develop self-esteem but the Buddha made too much of meditation and with the negative attitude the Buddha had towards personality and personhood he would not have been in favour of developing self-esteem for he wanted us to realize that individuality and personhood were illusions.

Self-esteem is the cure for weakness and unhappiness. By a simple change of attitude we can turn our lives around. But though it is simple it is not easy and is hard work. The work is entailed not in developing self-esteem but in getting rid of the things that stand in its way.

A Buddhist objected to this by saying that when someone's mother dies he can't accept it and renew happiness just at the drop of a hat. De Mello and myself have never said that a sudden change of attitude is all it takes to cope with life. It would be great if it could but the way we are made entails recovery being a long-term effort. What we are saying that it is a process and sometimes a long one. A change of attitude is all that is necessary to turn life into bliss and it is simple but not easy. The change of attitude takes hard work and comes to fruit gradually over time. DeMello would have believed that his mother when she died went to a better place and was still with him in spirit so his pain at her death would not have been terrible. He would have seen his strength as proving he was loving her enough to let her go for he couldn't bring her back.

In Buddhism you use the koans. One of them is trying to imagine the sound of one hand clapping. The aim is not to solve the contradiction for one hand cannot clap but to break through the block in your mind that keeps you from perceiving the state of nirvana or bliss. It is to stop your thinking working normally so that it can see the ultimate truth and experience the ecstasy it brings. You have to get your mind up to another level. Buddhists say there is no way to guarantee the experience will happen. You could meditate for five minutes with a koan and it will happen or it may take years of meditation. They think karma is the reason why this is so.

It has been complained that Zen Buddhists have disciples dwelling on the koans rather than on compassion for others. But there would seem to be no reason why koans should be prioritised that much.

DeMello disguised his system as devotion to God but God is just an accessory in it for it is all psychology and pragmatism and commonsense. Spiritual is relating the laws of the hidden realm to the earth and this is all about the earth and how to cope with it. The system defends living without God and that is what the practitioner of the system is doing no matter how much he says he loves God.

The DeMello system is sufficiently accurate. Religions that do not teach the DeMello system in its purity without his Roman Catholic accoutrements should be sued for wasting people's time and should be censured for negligence. You can do that with hospitals so why not religions for mental health is the most important health of all and more important than a hospital managing not to bungle surgery.

Awareness that most of what is called Buddhism (eg Lamaism) with its magic spells and gods is illegitimate.

DeMello speculates that Buddhism when it rejects the soul or God, has material type souls and gods in mind not the spiritual soul or God of Christianity which is without parts and which cannot be comprehended so it could or might indeed already accept these two concepts but under different terms and ways of describing them. But there is no need to assume that for Buddhism is very abstract and paradoxical.

Overall the non-Christian teachings of Awareness are commendable.

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