

Thought for the day from Jeff Burditt

In previous efforts, I've mentioned the words of Anthony de Mello and today I'd like to offer some more. Like Jesus, de Mello was a storyteller; like Jesus, who told parables, de Mello told stories which his readers had to meditate on. At the end, there will be a couple for you to have a think about. Whether you like them or not, they might provoke thought.

Anthony de Mello was an Indian Jesuit priest who joined the Jesuit order when he was 16 and later became director of a seminary. He also founded the Institute of Pastoral Counselling and his books have sold in their millions. Sadly he died in 1987 but it showed the popularity of his books that the Catholic Church conducted a review of his work - a review which was led by the man who would become Pope Benedict XV1. It concluded that, although it expressed appreciation for de Mello's work, it was concerned that Catholics could be misled into not seeing Jesus as the Son of God but preaching that all are children of God.

De Mello's main concerns were that, it seemed to him, absurd that all the world's religions seemed to be so antagonistic to one another, even if they believed basically in the same God. One of his other concerns was over the rules and regulations of the church which had become so fixed and inflexible (or so it seemed to him). He seems to have believed that the church indoctrinates us and our aim in life must be to try to gain self-understanding of who you are - in the ground of your being where you will find the indwelling God and thus gain understanding. One of his well-known sayings was this: "The lament of a bishop: 'wherever Jesus went there was a revolution; wherever I go people serve tea'.

In the introduction to one of his books, the editor says: "You will all probably find the language baffling, exasperating, even downright meaningless. It was written not to instruct, but to awaken... It is possible you will unwittingly chance upon the silent teaching that lurks within the book and be awakened - and transformed".

Anyway, here are a couple of de Mello's stories. See what you make of them.

1. When the Catholic priest asked children in his group what they wanted to be when they grew up, Tommy said he wanted to be a pilot, Elsie said she wanted to be a doctor and Bobby, to the priest's delight said he wanted to be a priest. Then Mary stood up and declared she wanted to be a prostitute. The priest was

startled and sent her out of the room. She was sent to the Bishop and she repeated her desire to become a prostitute.

"Did you say prostitute" said the Bishop, double checking.

"Yes"

"Heavens! What a relief. We all thought you said you were going to be a Protestant!"

2. There was once a woman who was very religious and devout and filled with love for God. Each morning she would go to church and on her way, children would call out to her, beggars would accost her but so immersed was she in her devotions that she did not notice them.

One day she walked to church as usual and arrived in time for the service. She pushed the door but found it locked. She was distressed at missing a church service for the first time in years. Then she looked up and found a note pinned to the door.

It said, "I'm out there!"

3. And finally, a familiar tale for Christians!

A sheep found a hole in the fence and crept through it. He wandered far and lost his way back. Then he realized he was being followed by a wolf. He ran and ran but the wolf kept chasing him until the shepherd came and rescued him and carried him back lovingly back to the fold. In spite of everyone's urgings to the contrary, the shepherd refused to nail up the hole in the fence.

If you think Anthony de Mello has something to say to you, then Taking Flight, One minute Wisdom and the Song of the Bird are still available to buy!!

God bless

Jeff