**231 – WHEN RELIGION GETS SICK (7/16/21)**

Most would agree that being religious does not assure goodness, wholeness, or moral uprightness. A very religious individual or group may actually project outlandish, thoughtless, and immoral behaviors which test personal well-being and the structures of a sane society.

As religion may assist in promoting what is good, it can equally advance evil, vindictiveness, and destruction. And it has. Under the canopy of religion, one may cuddle with strange thoughts and strategize evil behaviors, selfishly claiming a holy endorsement.

Recent history verifies crazy, religious acts like the Jonestown massacre of 1978 when more than 900 members of an American cult died suicidally under the leadership of a bogus, off-the-rail, self-ordained spiritualist named Jim Jones. In the 1990’s the Koresh Branch Davidian Cult was revealed for terrorizing the lives of its adherents, which is what religious cults often do. And surely, we know of the terrorist operatives in this century who have used and are using religion as a cloak, claiming deity support for even murderous behaviors.

As we speak, seemingly, there is an increase in religious narratives and activities that challenge sanity and wholeness. We may call these displays of spiritual arrogance a state of being wherein the mind and heart are consumed with negative energies that promote the adverse of mental and spiritual soundness. Religious tribalism is rampantly growing, promulgating religiosities that deny reason and are often heartless. These cult-like entities, are rich in religious speech, contrived theological tenets, and threatening manifestos, giving rise to hatreds that are notarized by a god of their own creation. These quasi-spiritual movements severely thwart human life and progress and lead us “… further from God and closer to the dust,” as the poet would say.

Obviously, I am incensed by those who assemble under the tent of religion and preach the ridiculous. Again, I remember the words of a mentor, theologian Carlyle Marney, who insightfully said a half-century ago: “Some of the sickest people I know are some of the most religious people I know.” The January 6 Capitol insurrection included a few bogus spiritualists who used a concocted religion to activate and perpetuate their mental illness.

Essayist Michele Boorstein reports of several accused Capitol insurrectionist making audacious religious alibis to support dark behaviors. One of the accused told the judge she was there amid the violence making a “divine special appearance.” Sickening.

Another accused participant in this war on democracy was and is a weekly convenor of religious services. Another accused rebellionist regularly shares Bible verses on YouTube and claims to be a “healer of deep inner wounds.” Sickening.

And then there is the accused fake Shaman, Jacob Chansley, with the horns on his head, praying during the riot at a dais in the Senate chamber, declaring that he was a “multidimensional being.” As I agree with what he calls himself, I wonder what his Senate Chamber prayer included i.e., love, peace, and good will among all people? Sickening.

When will the so-called Christian populace rise up and declare what they already know i.e., that many of these self-proclaimed Jesus people are not of Jesus at all? When will the white supremacists who subtly avow a spiritual fervor remember that Jesus did not possess white pigmentation?

I am sickened when religion is bastardized and used manically. I am tired of hearing about Bible study groups in churches being used to plot political strategy. Sound religion forwards goodness and that is what we need now, more than ever. A sure sign of religion de-railing is when it reflects and perpetuates shadowy behaviors under the sponsorship of the Divine.

Rev. Don Stevenson