

A Community for All – Richard Rohr

Wednesday, May 6, 2020

Jesus' intimacy with the nature of God as relationship inspired him to redefine the boundaries of family and tribe. Jesus extended kinship to everyone. Author and scholar Beatrice Bruteau (1930–2014) looks to Jesus for a fundamental understanding of what it means to be Christian community:

Jesus had a fundamental vision—faith that *all people* [emphasis mine] are “children of God.” This is the *theological* perspective of his “program,” on which everything else rests. I am supposing that he took this seriously, more or less literally, . . . teaching that each person has an uncreated soul that is actually a continuation of the Divine Life itself. When he met a person, therefore, he really believed that God was somehow present in that person, so he looked for that presence through all the overlying contradictions to it, until he found it. Then he addressed himself to that point in the person. As the Hindus also say, the divine in him saluted the divine in the other. When anyone does that, it tends to awaken the divine in the other, who is thus invited to speak from that place in return. [Notice the mutuality! It begins with one person's generous gaze, which is then returned in kind.] This is the sort of thing we will need to accustom ourselves to doing if we are to succeed in developing the further levels of the [Jesus] program. . . .

[One of the images of] Jesus' friendship community in which there are no lords or servants . . . was the family and the extended kinship [network]. . . . There are no sexual, racial, or historical barriers to membership in this family. Its intention is to include everyone. But this does not mean that it has no structure, no principles, no operating dynamic. It has these with great clarity, especially since they are all simple and even obvious, once the basic principle of social and personal equality has been seen and accepted. . . .

Once you see the basic truth, he might insist, that we are all God's children and therefore absolutely equal, the rest of it is just common sense. You don't need a divine teacher to spell it out for you, much less to set up a new battery of regulations and sanctions. You can make all the deductions and applications yourself and you will live by them because you see the truth and genuinely want to live that way.

Richard again: I believe most Christians have good intentions to follow Jesus' example, but they are quickly overrun by the “me-first” norms of mainstream culture. In moments of crisis, however, we seem to tap into something deeper and truer. We remember our kinship with one another. In the first weeks of the pandemic, I heard media reports of hoarding and price gouging, but I have heard far more stories of generosity, courage, compassion, and sacrifice for the sake of others. We do not all have the same gifts, but many seem to be giving their very best.

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