

Interspiritual Mysticism

Solidarity Instead of Judgment

Sunday, September 20, 2020

In our one small and interwoven world, the great spiritual messengers of all the sacred traditions are a universal human treasure, to be received and revered with the respect due an attained being, an exemplar of a higher level of human consciousness. —Cynthia Bourgeault

While many Christians are familiar, and possibly even comfortable, with the idea of interfaith dialogue, few have had exposure to the discipline of interspirituality. While the first tends to be a respectful exchange of ideas; the second is a shared journey into the depths of the heart. Most Christians have been discouraged from exploring the teachings and practices of other religions, but I believe the loving and universal scope of Jesus Christ provides us with a model of how to recognize and celebrate truth on the many different paths to God.

Through Jesus Christ, God's own broad, deep, and all-inclusive worldview is made available to us. In fact, I'd go so far as to say that the point of the Christian life is not to distinguish oneself from the other world religions, but to stand in radical solidarity with everyone and everything else. This is the full, final, and intended effect of the Incarnation—symbolized by the cross, which is God's great act of solidarity instead of judgment. This is how we are to imitate Jesus, the good Jewish man who saw and called forth the divine in Gentiles like the Syro-Phoenician woman and the Roman centurions who followed him; in Jewish tax collectors who collaborated with the Empire; in zealots who opposed it; in sinners of all stripes; in eunuchs, pagan astrologers, and all those "outside the law." Jesus had no trouble whatsoever with otherness.

If we are ready to reclaim the true meaning of "catholic," which is "universal," we must concentrate on including—as Jesus dearly did—instead of excluding—which he never did. The only thing Jesus excluded was exclusion itself.

After the incarnation of Jesus, humanity could more easily imagine a give-and-take, relational and forgiving God. Christians had a very good model and messenger in Jesus, but many outliers actually came to the "banquet" more easily, as Jesus often says in his parables of the resented and resisted banquet (Matthew 22:1–10; Luke 14:7–24), where "the wedding hall was filled with guests, both good and bad alike" (Matthew 22:10). What are we to do with such divine irresponsibility, such endless largesse, such unwillingness on God's part to build walls or create unneeded boundaries?

We must be honest and humble about this: many people of other faiths, like Sufi masters, Jewish prophets, many philosophers, and Hindu mystics, have lived in light of the Divine encounter better than many Christians. And why would a God worthy of the name God not care about all of God's children? (Read Wisdom 11:23–12:2 for a powerful Scripture in this regard.) Does God really have favorites among God's children? What an unhappy family that would create—and indeed, has created. (Adapted from Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For, and Believe* (Convergent: 2019), 32, 33, 34.)