

ESSAY 5

HOW HUMAN ARROGANCE HAS CREATED AND SHAPED RELIGION

It all began very simply. The Holy One created someone to love- someone with whom to communicate and be with - along with a beautiful and sustaining place to live. We have a metaphorical reference to that occurrence in Genesis 1: 'In the beginning God created . . .'

In that same account, reference is made to the human arrogance which disrupted and distorted the initial love relationship between the creator and the created. The rest is history - the history of a loving God persistently attempting to redeem human arrogance and restore the disrupted creator/created relationship. Unfortunately, human arrogance persists, and the distortion of the truth of God's intention abounds.

The scenario is universal. Human arrogance has transformed our response to God's love into a religion. We have not been satisfied simply with *experiencing God's love* which was the divine plan. Rather, we have reshaped and distorted our perception of God's plan for us. This has resulted in the creation of countless world religions, each of which has in turn divided itself into an array of splinter groups. Alas, every one of them claims to hold the ultimate truth about God's expectations as the basis of its existence.

Each group does indeed hold a modicum of truth, but only a modicum. Yet, each has notified the world of its unique correctness derived from some special divine revelation. In this process each has created and shaped its own belief system, theology and a set of religious practices.

ESSAY 5

Unfortunately, many of these practices are benign and do not enhance ones *experience of God*, but instead they separate each group from every other, which is divisive. Believing its own system is uniquely correct, each group has developed a missionary enterprise - some helpful to the recipient such as medical care. Unfortunately, much of the missionary effort does not go into helping people, but into proselytizing in order to expand its own group. "Come be with us. We have it right." This is the epitome of arrogance - devoid of God's love, and flies in the face of the oneness of God's people. All of us who identify with some organized religious group are guilty of perpetuating this arrogance. It's tragic, destructive and sadly addictive.

Wars have been fought over these religious differences - the differences becoming more important than the one thing held in common - God's love and presence. For example: Within Islam, sects fight against each other, believing those Muslims who differ in their beliefs are infidels and should be killed. Each sect believes it interprets the Koran most correctly.

The same shameful error is made by Christian groups who insist they alone interpret the Bible correctly, each believing it holds the ultimate truth about God and the divine hopes. However, the reality is: Every single one of these groups has departed from the simple truth of God's equal and unconditional love of everyone, desiring nothing in return except our love and companionship. Furthermore, and contrary to common belief, God is not concerned about our obedience, but wants only for us to *experience the Divine Presence*. When that Divine hope is fulfilled, everything else will automatically follow. God wants to be with us. That is our reason for being

ESSAY 5

in the first place. God wants someone to be with. That is why we are here. That was the purpose of creation, as stated at the outset.

It is all so simple, yet we have turned it into a complex and complicated religious scene, because of our arrogance - believing we know more about what the Holy One wants us to believe and do than anyone else, or even God.

Each religious group has taken a parcel of truth about God - believing it to be the whole truth - and developed an extensive religious belief system coupled with demanding religious practices - you should do this or that!! Religion is in the business of control, creating boundaries, while God's love is freeing and knows no limits. *Experiencing God's unconditional love*, on the one hand, and *religious belief and practice*, on the other hand, are two very different experiences. We need to opt for *experiencing God's love* and refute *religious belief and practice*. That is the challenge to every Christian group.

Richard Rohr, a Franciscan theologian and spiritual icon has set forth the following historical framework describing the path the Christian Church has taken from its inception to the present: The early Church in Israel offered people the opportunity to *experience God*. When it moved into Greece, it became a philosophy. When it moved to Rome and Constantinople it became an organized religion. When it spread to Europe it became a culture. When it came to America it became a business. That's where we are today: The church has become a business with

ESSAY 5

budgets, boards, officers, managers, (priests, pastors, bishops), like every other business.

Having made all these moves and changes through the years, it has lost sight of its original mission - simply providing an *experience with God*. The Christian Church, regardless of its denominational or group title, has ended up promoting religious traditions rather than simply providing an *experience with God*, as referenced in the Biblical account in Genesis 1.

God did not create religion; we humans have done it. We have also created the divisions out of our arrogance. God most likely ignores our fabricated divisions and loves us all equally in spite of our foolishness.

At the end of the day it's not about us anyway. It's all about God. It is not about *what* we believe but *in whom* we believe. What has been made clear to us in many ways is: We are all loved equally by God, who doesn't let our arrogance or what we believe get in the way. The important thing for us is to *experience God and celebrate it*. This calls for a *spiritual* awakening!!
To follow.