

Daily Meditation 10/21/2022

Nolan on the Jesus Story, Politics and Religion

Good morning.

We continue our meditations with Albert Nolan, who died this week, and who, like a number of people of our time, our generation, stood up for justice, stood up for compassion--and in very harrowing circumstances, namely, in South Africa during the time of apartheid.

He spoke up and even had to go underground, because he was working with young people who were protesting and speaking up, including a lot of black youth, who were coming into their own power and demanding change in the apartheid government of that time.

And in today's meditation with Albert Nolan, he makes some very important points. One is "Jesus did not found an organization; he inspired a movement."

Now that relativizes our versions of religion and of church, doesn't it? Just one sentence: "Jesus did not found an organization; he inspired a movement."

Now, Nolan is not unrealistic. As he says, it was inevitable that the movement could quite soon become an organization. But in the beginning, they were simply people, scattered individuals and groups, who had been inspired by Jesus. And, as he says, each one understood the story in their own way, as it still is today, 2000 years later.

And he points out there were at first no doctrines, no dogmas, no universally accepted way of following Christ or in believing in him. So, this lives up to the title of his book, *Jesus before Christianity*, because Christianity became a thing, an institution.

And interestingly, movements had to pop up through history, to challenge it, to challenge the thing, the institution, the religion called Christianity, to try to bring it back more authentically to the teachings in the person of Jesus. The monastic movement, like the Benedictine movement, in the fifth century, did that. The Desert Fathers and Mothers movement in the third century did that. And of course, the movements of St. Francis and St. Dominic, in the early 13th century, tried to do that also. And there are other movements through the centuries--St. Ignatius in the 16th century, with the Jesuit order.

And of course, then there were movements within the organization structure itself, like the Second Vatican Council in the late 20th century, in the 1960s, inspired by Pope John the 23rd, tried in its way to shake up the institutional structure and church and bring it more in tune with the spirit and teachings of Jesus.

And even now, Pope Francis is trying to shake things up. Certainly, in his encyclical on our common mother and home, Mother Earth/ecology, he spoke very bluntly about what our humanity has to do to stand up to climate change and the forces--the economic forces, too--that are taking us down the wrong path.

More recently, in our Order of Sacred Earth, we are trying to propose that we live in a post-denominational time, that people of all religions should gather, and of none--atheists are welcome, too--into a loosely defined community that takes just one vow: "I promise to be the best lover of Mother Earth (therefore mystic) and the best defender of Mother Earth (therefore prophet) that I can be."

And so, I do believe that Albert Nolan speaks very directly about the pre-Christian Church, if you will, gathering, that Jesus was involved in. It was a movement and not an organization.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.