

Religieux Pensees
Reflection Four: On Our Interconnectedness

One of the most famous phrases in all of English literature is the phrase: "No man is an island, entire of itself;" its fame was no doubt influenced by its facilitation when Ernest Hemingway cited it in his great novel: For Whom the Bell Tolls.

The phrase itself comes from John Donne's Meditation 17 written by the great poet and churchman in 1623. Donne was a poet, who had the gift of marvelous insight, a metaphysical thinker of great depth, and a writer whose rich imagery touched and even yet touches the hearts and lives of many in the English speaking world. Placing this phrase in the larger context from which it comes, we read:

"No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or thine own were. Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."

It is clear, of course, the tolling of the bell of which Donne speaks, is a tolling for one who has passed from this life to the next, a tolling that honored the life of one leaving our midst. But, poet, churchman and theologian that he was, Donne cast more significant meaning and deeper understanding into those experiences and words. It relates to the very essence of the Christian faith, exploring and giving meaning to the interconnectedness of this life we share with one another and with God. His insights permit us to come to an understanding of not only who we are, but to whom we ultimately belong.

We pause and we reflect on our lives with one another; we seek to explore our relationship with God in deeper, richer ways; we are more keenly aware that our relationship with God must find its way into more positive, creative, loving relationships with our fellow human beings. For it is in this way that we truly become more human, more truly bearers of the image of God in our lives. John Donne captured this profoundly when he points out that "any man's death diminishes me." Certainly then, the death of Jesus of Nazareth, the perfect human, "diminishes me" absolutely! If we have even the most limited understanding of this, we, in our frail and limited ways, will be enlightened in our love and concern for our fellow human beings, even those who are our foes or enemies. All this is possible for us as we move toward Jesus of Nazareth whose image is to be reflected in us as a gentle reality in our lives. The true joy of this experience is simply this: we catch a glimpse of what it means to be a child of

God, a true human being and we, and the world, are never the same again for we have been touched by God---a God of peace, compassion, and love!

We are, as the gospel and John Donne suggest, every man---each one of us, a piece of the continent; we are, every man, woman and child, a piece with one another. We share in life's joys, as well as life's sorrows; we share in life's gifts, as well as its pain; we share in life's grace and love, because we have as our foundation the Ground of All Being, even God; we have grace and love which enables us to extinguish the pseudo-power of hate; we have peace that overcomes all evil and passes all understanding. We have a life that is rich toward God and toward one another. Go, share that with everyone and you shall be fulfilled!

William P. Anderson, February 2008