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Jesus said, 'I call you friends,' but not on Facebook

Eugene Cullen Kennedy | Jul. 19, 2012 Bulletins from the Human Side

Right now, someone -- frequently more than just one as these web dwellers gather like flash mobs at the farthest end of long chains of tenuous connections -- is planning to ?friend? you on Facebook.

Who the hell are these people, one is tempted to ask, as you survey the ?notifications? that this now dominant social network slips into your in-box concerning people who, even if they are located beyond the famous six degrees of separation in the human family, apparently know somebody who knows somebody who may know you, and now, want you to be their friend, excuse me, to ?friend? you.

This may be the closest thing to a drunken stranger at a cocktail party insisting that you go out afterward for another drink together, ?Whatsa matter, you don?t like me or something??

You may be able to get rid of the stranger at the cocktail party but there is no way to fend off forever the strangers seeking to ?friend? you on Facebook for the latter Internet monster is as relentless as the IRS in telling you that ?You have notifications pending.?

?Oh, call it,? if we may apply the ancient Zeno?s advice about friendship, ?by some better name, for ?to friend? seems too cold.?

Indeed, the devaluation of genuine friendship and the unexpected out-sourcing of sorrow are the principal by-products of what has now become a money making enterprise, correction, an enterprise trying desperately to make money.

But what could be more real in contemporary history than Facebook? After all, a movie has already been made about it, and if this basically unreal phenomenon is turned into a reality TV show, it will be stamped genuine and be invested with secular immortality.

In almost every language but ours, it is clear that the word friend comes from the word meaning love, as in the French *ami* from the Latin, *amare*, to love. Not often recognized is the prefix *pri-*, that is found in other sacred words, such as freedom, that means ?to make a safe place for those you love.? That is why family members feel free under the same roof with each other.

There is an echo of freedom in friend, as there is in Friday, the day of Venus, the day, therefore, of love. Friendship is something whose depth fits human aspirations and fulfills human possibilities. It has heft to it, as a gold-piece does and a gambling chip does not.

There is Mystery in Friendship and people speak of it as something that gives them life and that is worth dying for. It is the prerequisite for intimacy for, as Henry Adams wrote, ?Intimates are predestined,? and, if you surrender your intimacy indiscriminately, you will never feel the wonder of friendship or the magic of true love.

Only recently have there been reports of the side-effects of the open range pseudo-intimacy of Facebook

exchanges. Facebook may not only propapagate cyber-loneliness but exacerbate the pain of loss that estranged family members feel when they hear only indirectly, through a third-party posting, news of a child or parent with whom they have not spoken in years.

In a recent story in *The New York Times* [1] (6/15/12) psychologist Joshua Coleman says, ?I frequently hear, ?I just learned from somebody else who read it on Facebook that my son just got married,? or ?My daughter just had a child, and I didn?t even know she was pregnant.? These are events, he notes, that parents ?assumed all their lives they?d be there for, then they hear in a very public third hand-way about it, and it adds a level of hurt and humiliation.?

If you have seen the movie about the founding of Facebook you might have the impression that its inventors seemed more like children than adults. But we read about children every day who have caused serious accidents by playing with things, like loaded guns and matches, whose destructive potential they are not mature enough to understand. If war is too serious to be left to generals then love and friendship are too serious to be left to the children who did not grasp that they were outsourcing sorrow in a way never done before in a world that already has more pain than it can manage.

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