

Eulogy for Renata von Baeyer, July 2, 1911 – July 3, 1977

Memorial Service, July 6, 1977
[G. Laird](#), Minister
University Hill United Church, Vancouver

Scripture Readings:
Matthew 5: 1-16
Matthew 25: 31-46

By her bedside table, Renata had a little book of biblical meditation, which she followed day by day with her sister, who read an identical book, many thousands of miles away. On the date of her death, July 3, this was the passage in that little book:

"Die Augen des Herrn merken auf die Gerechten und seine Ohren auf ihr Schreien." (The eyes of the Lord notice the Righteous and His ears, their cries.)

Renata was one of the Righteous whom The Lord paid attention to. The English word "Righteous" in our normal usage fails to capture the full biblical meaning of the concept, and we unwittingly substitute the word "self-righteous" conjuring up a picture of someone rather narrow, perhaps prudish, naïve about the affairs of the world, with a self-imposed set of moral standards which the person is anxious to inflict upon everyone else. This picture does not fit Renata in any way.

Renata was, is, righteous because she lived in God's mercy, in God's love, she lived in God's Righteousness...and felt it was her worldly part to try to extend His Righteousness to everyone she met.

Her concern in this was never for her own safety or comfort, but for those around her, her family, her community, wherever she happened to live. The needs of children were paramount for Renata. And she thought about these needs in a different way from most of us. Her thought process was simple--when a need of someone becomes obvious, there is only one thing to do, to meet it directly, immediately, usually by starting to do something about it herself, then involving others, not being afraid to badger civic, provincial, or federal officials into fulfilling their clear responsibilities in the area. And never for self-glory. Only to fill the need.

Fleeing during the last war with her husband and child, the family was in a car heading for the Austrian border, the child sewn into a radio in the rear of the car; the road was being strafed by airplanes, cars to the right and left had pulled off the road to save themselves from the strafing, Renata was asked, "What shall we do?". With the almost mystical sense she showed on many similar occasions, she announced, with a look and voice which allowed for no alternatives, "Drive straight through". And only those who drove straight through were spared.

See a need, meet that need, drive straight through!

Whether it was to airlift refugee children out of danger in Germany in the mid thirties, or showing concern for abused children in Vancouver in 1977, when a need was clear she began to

meet it, found people, found ways. She had a gift for sensing where and when community problems were arising, was consistently ahead of her community in recognizing danger, whether that community was in Germany, in Switzerland, in Ottawa or Vancouver. For some, politics is a dirty word, for Renata, to support the candidate of her choice with all her heart, soul and effort was only her minimum duty as a citizen. For her, being involved in Women's affairs, such as the Council of Women, was the calling of every woman.

For her children to summarize what their Mother meant to them was an impossible task. What do you say about a Mother, who is leading you all in hiking up the Alps, and then uses the time on the summit to discuss the drug problems in Vancouver? A Mother whose last words are to finish your thesis so you don't become a career student? Who would use the occasion of a walk on University Beach to see the seals, to discuss the problems of alcohol dependency?

Renata was the conscience of our congregation, the Presbytery, the Conference, of our city. And a conscience is something we have all learned in one way or another to live with. Sometimes we live with it by ignoring it, or being mad at it, or being uncomfortable with it. Few of us really listen to what our conscience is trying to say to us. But she was not a self-appointed conscience, for it was not her own righteousness she reflected: it was the Righteousness of One Who said: Blessed are the peacemakers, blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, (Matt. 5), and Who said: Come O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me. Then the righteous will answer him, Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee? And the King will answer them, Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.

When I asked her sons what the basic theme of this address should be, they answered without a moment's pause or a trace of doubt, it should be "Carry on the Work". That's why the scripture passages for today are not the traditional, soothing, comforting passages. Renata cared nothing for her personal comfort, as the last few weeks and months of her life would bear witness, and I don't believe she would want me to leave you feeling comfortable today. The social aspects of being a Christian, which she characterized as "tea drinking" were beyond her patience. There are wrongs to be righted, prisoners to be visited and freed, poor to be fed, dependencies to be cured. And now we have all to do those things, without Renata. She was vigilant for us all...and now she's gone. And the world's the worse for it.

That is our challenge. No greater memorial could be established to Renata, than that we all take a measure from her devotion, vigilance, care for community, personal responsibility, her love, her righteousness.

*"The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and his ears toward their cry."
(Psalm 34:15)*